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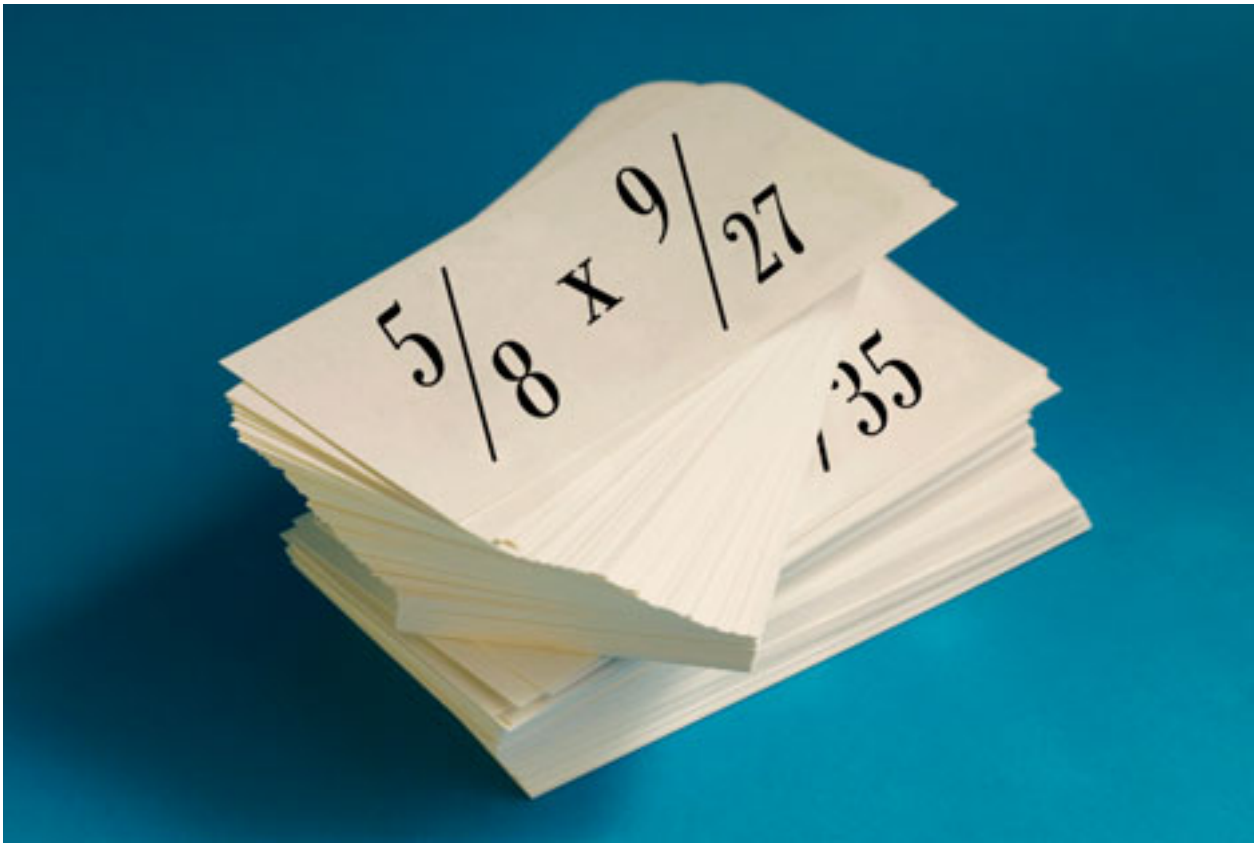

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The Thinness of His Skin

President Obama is beginning to say reliably disconcerting things in public, from his offhand dismissals of longtime foreign allies to his recent assertion in Illinois: "I do think at a certain point that you've made enough money." The Scrapbook would like to have listened in on the clarifying telephone call after that one between Obama and supporter/contributor Warren "$62 Billion and Counting" Buffett.

But for startling insight into the mind of our 44th president, we cannot do better than his recent commencement address at Hampton University in Virginia. Most graduation speeches are predictably anodyne and tend to rely on well-worn generalities. Obama, by contrast, was refreshingly specific at Hampton: He does not like the newfangled means by which many of today's college graduates—or anyone, for that matter—obtain information.

> You're coming of age in a 24/7 media environment that bombards us with all kinds of content and exposes us to all kinds of arguments, some of which don't rank all that high on the truth meter. With iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations—none of which I know how to work—information becomes a distraction, a diversion, a form of entertainment, rather than a tool of empowerment, rather than the means of emancipation.

"Some of the craziest claims can quickly gain traction," he added, referring to talk radio and blogs.

These well-chosen words tell us a lot about Barack Obama, and none of it good. To begin with, it is abundantly clear that Obama may well be the president with the thinnest skin since James Knox Polk, who at least had the decency to rail at his critics in the privacy of his diary. Obama is not only indignant about criticism, hostile comment, and "the craziest claims" about himself and his policies: He is furious that citizens have access to different viewpoints without regulatory control. Public discourse in a free society is not a virtue in itself, according to the president; it should be a "tool of empowerment" or "means of emancipation," not "a form of entertainment."

The Scrapbook can well imagine the uproar if Obama's predecessor had looked new graduates in the eye and griped about "iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations—none of which I know how to work." But the people who would have moaned about George W. Bush's luddism seem not especially bothered by the fact that the nation's chief executive has just issued a strongly worded public warning about the baleful effects of free speech and dissent. On the matter of political rhetoric, Barack Obama seems to have the same approach as his vision of health care: distrust for the market, faith in Big Brother.

Not to mention the fact that his logic is upside-down. Sure, iPods and iPads and Xboxes and PlayStations convey a lot of nonsense, and some portion of their content is "a form of entertainment." But does Obama really believe that, in the old "media environment" of newspapers and wire services and magazines and TV networks, forms of entertainment didn't sneak in through the window—and that everything published in newspapers, or flashed across the wires, always ranked high on the truth meter? The Scrapbook can assure him that it didn't, still doesn't, and never will.♦

The White House Targets Little Debbie

Spearheaded by First Lady Michelle Obama, the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity has just released its list of recommendations, some of which seem sensible enough, even to The Scrapbook. Take, for instance, Recommendation 3.17: "Promote healthy behaviors in juvenile correctional and related facilities." (Scared straight and lose weight at the same time!)

But then we came across Recommendation 2.4: "Restaurants should consider their portion sizes, improve children's menus, and make healthy options the default choice whenever possible." Is it so bad that a place like the Cheesecake Factory serves up a generous portion of its Factory Meatloaf, half of which you can then take home for tomorrow's lunch? Or that one heaping dinner plate of linguini and clams at Carmine's can sustain a family of four over the next few days? Apparently the answer is yes. As Margo Wootan of the Center for Science in the Public Interest told the *Washington Post*'s Robin Givhan, "Value marketing has been so lucrative for restaurants. . . . They can give you more food on a plate, charge you more and make a profit."

The Scrapbook is shocked to learn that there are people in this country—in the restaurant business, no less—who seek to make a profit. And how can any self-respecting restaurateur charge you more when he serves you more? In the Age of Obama, that just doesn't make any economic sense.

Finally there's Recommendation 2.6: "All media and entertainment companies should limit the licensing of their popular characters to food and beverage products that are healthy and consistent with science-based nutrition standards." Bart Simpson used to advertise for Butterfinger—will he start endorsing organic broccolini?

Of course these are just recommendations. Except that in the *Post* writeup, Givhan notes that "while the federal government can't solve the obesity epidemic, it is prepared

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to take action where others don't. . . . While many of the recommendations to food manufacturers and marketers rely on the enormous bully pulpit of the federal government as the motivation to act, the task force noted that agencies reserve the right to use more extreme measures—subpoenas and new regulations—if need be." Duck and cover, Little Debbie!

And it gets worse: Federal Trade Commission chairman Jon Leibowitz "noted during a question-and-answer session that he has not ruled out regulatory action if companies don't make headway in decreasing the amount of junk food advertised to kids. The report recommended that the federal and state governments 'analyze the effect of state and local sales taxes on less healthy, energy-dense foods.' In other words, a sugar or fat tax."

Subpoenas? To quote Michelle Malkin, "First they came for the Cheerios . . . " ♦

Liberals Throw Harvard Under the Bus

In their scramble to explain away Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan's indefensible discrimination against military recruiters as Harvard Law dean, her defenders have made some pretty remarkable concessions. For example, in a disingenuous *Washington Post* op-ed, "How I know Kagan isn't anti-military," former Clinton administration solicitor general Walter Dellinger claims that it's wrong to equate Harvard Law's no-military-recruiter-on-campus policy "with the anti-military and anti-ROTC policies favored by some campus leftists in the 1970s. Those policies, however, were categorically different: They were directed at the military."

So Dellinger contemptuously dismisses "the anti-military and anti-ROTC policies favored by some campus leftists in the 1970s." But these policies weren't just favored by a few flakes in the 1970s. They are in place on major campuses today—including at Harvard, for example, where ROTC is denied official recognition.

The Scrapbook has a suggestion: If Dellinger is opposed to such anti-military and anti-ROTC policies, he should use his considerable prestige to weigh in for changing them. And if Kagan agrees with Dellinger that anti-ROTC policies are indefensible, we assume she'll say so at her hearings. Indeed, perhaps it will turn out that she spoke against them as dean of Harvard Law School, since her deanship coincided with a period of considerable controversy about ROTC at Harvard. Or perhaps she didn't.

In any case, Congress should take a look at extending the Solomon Amendment—which required Harvard Law to accept military recruiters on campus if Harvard were to continue receiving federal funds—to the case of discrimination against ROTC on campus. ♦

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (Journalism Division)

'The book, reported with [Marcus] Brauchli's and [Robert] Thomson's cooperation, reports that Brauchli's relationship with [new owner Rupert] Murdoch did not get off to the strongest start. After completing his $5 billion takeover of Dow Jones, Murdoch invited Brauchli [then editor of the *Wall Street Journal*, now editor of the *Washington Post*], whom he had never met, to breakfast or lunch that Friday. Brauchli said he would have to check his calendar and call him back. . . . " ("One editor's balancing act on the high wire of

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modern journalism," Howard Kurtz, *Washington Post*, May 10.) ♦

Tory-lit

Louise Bagshawe is a British writer of what's popularly known as chick-lit—books aimed at female readers. Her latest is *Desire*, following along the same literary path as her earlier books—*Glitz*, *Glamour*, *Passion*, and *Sparkles*. At Oxford, she was "vivacious" and "lively," a friend says. She played in a heavy metal rock band. She's a divorced mother of three and for a while was a fan of Tony Blair, the Labor prime minister.

Bagshawe, 38, is now a Conservative member of parliament. On May 6, she ousted a Labor M.P. in Corby, the Midlands constituency north of London where she lives. And she is typical of the nontraditional candidates recruited by Prime Minister David Cameron to diversify the stodgy, old Conservative party.

Or maybe not so typical, because Bagshawe turns out to be a Thatcherite. She blogs on Tim Montgomerie's CentreRight website. A few weeks before the election, in an item titled "No guts, no glory," she wrote, "My heroine, Margaret Thatcher, famously said that when she left politics she was going to start a 'rent-a-spine' business. . . . This is the best possible time to be a Tory. We have a priceless chance to make a difference, to get a government in that will fix our sinking economy, mend our broken society, and restore social justice and Britain's pride in itself."

Whew! By the way, her fictional heroines struggle their way to the top, with no special privileges, and earn everything they achieve. Maybe her next novel will be called *Rogue*. ♦

Correction

As several readers pointed out, we mistakenly identified Ray Mabus two weeks ago as a former Mississippi congressman ("Scuttle the USS *Murtha*). Mabus, now secretary of the Navy, is a former governor and state auditor of Mississippi. ♦

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Deals on Wheels

Through a combination of family generosity, stinginess, and luck, I managed to go 35 years without doing business with a professional car salesman. So when the hour finally arrived for me to put on my big-boy pants and buy a car, I took the task seriously. I wanted to bring robust econometric analysis to bear on the car market. I wanted to become an automotive Bill James.

Buying used was a given—I'm not the kind of sucker who absorbs the depreciation that hits the moment a new car leaves the lot. Instead, my first important decision was to avoid sellers who negotiate price. The received wisdom is that outfits with "no-haggle" prices charge more than the best price you can get from a dealer who bargains. My assumption, however, was that I would be no match for a car salesman. I'm an amateur, and car salesmen do this for a living. If I went up against a pro, I would almost certainly pay more than the built-in mark-up at a no-haggle store. So I chose a no-haggle vendor called Carmax.

Carmax is a national chain of used car dealerships. You can search their entire inventory—tens of thousands of vehicles—online. The vehicles' specifications, mileage, history, and price are all readily available to consumers. Since the prices you see are essentially final-sale prices, I treated their site as a data mine.

The first bit of gold I found was a market failure. I had initially targeted the Ford Fusion as my prospective car. It's a sensible family sedan with excellent reliability and acceptable performance. Most important, it's an obvious value-play compared with the other cars at the top of its class, such as the pricey Toyota Camry and Honda Accord.

I started tracking Fusions in early 2009. In July, something odd happened: The prices on used Fusions started going up, an after-effect of the Cash for Clunkers program. This bit of government interference greatly benefited new car buyers but drove pre-owned prices sky-high. (Thanks, President Obama!) I was waiting for Fusion prices to drift back to earth when I noticed the Mercury Milan.

The Milan and the Fusion are corporate twins. The cars are made by the same parent company on the same design platform in the same manufacturing plant using the same components. The only minor difference is that the Milan has a slightly upgraded interior, which makes it a tad more expensive new.

MATT COLLINS

But on the used market, it was a different story. Used Milans were anywhere from 10 percent to 20 percent cheaper than equivalent Fusions. Why? The only explanation was that Ford spends lots of advertising dollars on the Fusion, but none on the Milan. The market's ignorance was my bliss.

With the Milan as my new target, I concentrated on finding the optimal model year/mileage value point. I panned Carmax's website for every variation of the Milan and created a scatter graph for each model, plotting price against mileage. Running a best-fit curve for each of these graphs, I examined the slope of the curves, looking for the moment where the dx/dt—the rate of depreciation—began to flatten out.

To optimize value you want a car that sits at the precise moment where the rate of its value loss most quickly decelerates. I found it, with a large enough data set to give me confidence in my numbers.

For good measure, I repeated the exercise with nearby model years—looking at 2007, 2008, and 2009 Milans—and then plotted those curves on top of one another to calculate how much of a price premium each successive year commanded. (The answer is that the model-year premium is not constant. It varies depending on where you are on the mileage curve. Assuming, of course, that you're within the same design cycle.)

Eventually, I found my dream car—which is to say, the car I was convinced represented the best value. And the deal Carmax was offering was better than it should have been. Much better.

On the scatter graph, the car was a gigantic outlier, with a price significantly lower than my calculations said it should be. As I examined the data point, I saw that the car was loaded, too. It had a leather interior, a moonroof, and all-wheel drive.

In fact, it was such an outlier that its superior value would have leapt out at anyone even without my statistical analysis or asset depreciation calculus. What I couldn't understand, staring at that mountain of data, was why the price was so good.

It was only when I finally called up a picture of the car that I saw in a flash: There was one factor I hadn't accounted for—a factor so powerful that it delivered more value than all of my sabremetrics and market failures put together.

My new car is purple.

Jonathan V. Last

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Kate Walsh wants to get sea turtles off the hook.

Do you?

Kate Walsh participates in leatherback sea turtle conservation in St. Croix. Photo © Tim Calver

1.4 billion fishing hooks and other gear catch hundreds of thousands of sea turtles every year. And many beaches are now unsuitable for nesting. Every species in U.S. waters is at risk of extinction. That's why we need to do something now. Join Kate Walsh and Oceana and help get sea turtles off the hook.

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the weekly Standard

Why Obama Chose Kagan

In January, in *Citizens United* v. *Federal Election Commission*, the Supreme Court held that under the First Amendment Congress may not limit corporate and union funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections. The Court overturned one of its own rulings and a provision of the McCain-Feingold legislation enacted in 2002. The decision has drawn impassioned and frequent rebukes from President Obama, who said the day it came down that it would empower "special interests and their lobbyists" at the expense of "average Americans who make small contributions to support their preferred candidates." He criticized *Citizens United* during his State of the Union speech, with most of the justices in attendance, and, when John Paul Stevens, who wrote a lengthy dissent in *Citizens United*, announced his retirement, Obama cited it as the kind of decision he didn't want the next justice to support.

Six of nine justices at the 2010 State of the Union

NEWSCOM

Last week, introducing solicitor general Elena Kagan as his choice to replace Stevens, Obama again brought up *Citizens United*. He mentioned it as evidence that Kagan was on the side of average Americans. "She defended bipartisan campaign finance reform against special interests seeking to spend unlimited money to influence our elections," he said. Her work on the case, Obama went on, "says a great deal about her commitment to protect our fundamental rights, because in a democracy, powerful interests must not be allowed to drown out the voices of ordinary citizens."

What's most striking about the Kagan nomination is the extent to which it is about Obama. It's no secret that he sees the Supreme Court's conservative majority as a potential obstacle to his agenda. Health care reform is already being litigated in federal and state courts. Other key Obama initiatives—environmental and financial regulations, for instance—are likely to wind up in court. *Citizens United*, Obama believes, gives him a chance to make the case that it is the conservative justices who are the real judicial activists and whom the country should truly beware. Obama, according to the *New York Times*, "plans to make the [decision] a theme on the stump heading into campaign season." Obama has proven willing to politicize the Court as no president since Franklin Roosevelt.

But surely there are Republicans on the Senate Judiciary Committee prepared to challenge the president by standing up for a fundamental liberty. Recall that Citizens United, a conservative nonprofit, wanted to distribute a political documentary about then-Senator Hillary Clinton, a candidate in the Democratic primaries. The Court might have ruled narrowly for Citizens United but for the concession by the government's lawyer that campaign finance law as it had evolved through McCain-Feingold could be constitutionally enforced to ban a book with the same point of view as the video.

A few months later the Court asked the parties to re-argue the case along broader lines. Obviously there were justices who sensed something was wrong with a system that could so limit political speech. During the re-argument, Kagan assured the justices that the government had never sought to ban a book. But she left no doubt that in the government's view it had the authority under the law to ban books if necessary. The Court felt compelled to enforce the First Amendment, with Anthony Kennedy writing the majority opinion:

> When government seeks to use its full power, including the criminal law, to command where a person may get his or her information or what distrusted source he or she may not hear, it uses censorship to control thought. This is unlawful. The First Amendment confirms the freedom to think for ourselves.

The effort to restrict political spending began with the Progressives, who also were impatient with the Constitution's limits on government power. Obama regards himself as their political descendant, so it's not surprising either that he opposes *Citizens United* or seeks to expand the reach and influence of an already outsized government.

Obama made clear in nominating Kagan that he expects a justice who will advance his progressive political agenda. Senate Republicans would be remiss if they failed to understand his intention and articulate to the country the constitutional issues at stake.

—*Terry Eastland*

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What's So Special?

Can this relationship be saved?

BY FRED BARNES

Less than an hour after David Cameron became British prime minister last week, he got a congratulatory phone call from President Obama. That was merely a courtesy. What the president said was not. "As I told the prime minister," the president said in a statement later, "the United States has no closer friend and ally than the United Kingdom, and I reiterated my deep and personal commitment to the special relationship between our two countries, a bond that has endured for generations and across party lines."

Given Obama's role in tearing down the once formidable partnership between the United States and the United Kingdom, his words may represent a significant shift in his foreign policy. Or they could be diplomatic happy talk, signifying little. We'll know soon enough, for issues that have divided the United States and Britain are bound to crop up even before Cameron visits Washington in July.

The near-extinction of the "special relationship," as Winston Churchill dubbed the American-British bond in 1946, has occurred over the past half-decade without noticeable angst either here or in Britain. On the contrary, political leaders in both countries have foolishly abetted its decline.

The gratuitous words of a State Department official in May 2009 were particularly harmful. "There's nothing special about Britain," the official said. "You're just the same as the other 190 countries in the world. You shouldn't expect special treatment." This came after Prime Minister Gordon Brown had been treated shabbily at the White House.

A year later, a British parliamentary committee said the phrase "special relationship" should be jettisoned. Its use "is potentially misleading and we recommend that its use be avoided. . . . [It may] raise unrealistic expectations about the benefits the relationship can deliver to the U.K."

Obama has done his part to downgrade ties to Britain. He avoided, until last week, mentioning the special relationship, and he ostentatiously sent a bust of Churchill in the Oval Office back to the British embassy. For his part, Cameron said in 2006, on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, that Britain "should be solid but not slavish in our friendship with America." He said the British government under Tony Blair had become "uncritical allies of America," this at a time when the war in Iraq had become unpopular in Britain.

The most offensive slight, however, was delivered in a written statement by the State Department in February. It declared the United States to be neutral in the dispute between Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. "The United States recognizes the de facto U.K. administration of the islands but takes no position on the sovereignty claims of either party," it said.

This infuriated the Brits, understandably so. Argentina has no legitimate claim to the Falklands, and the Kirchner regime in Argentina is both corrupt and noisily anti-American. The U.S. statement made sense only if the administration sought to curry favor with Argentina at the expense of a loyal ally.

And the administration's stance, presumably approved by Obama, clashed sharply with President Reagan's support for Britain during the Falklands war in 1982. Reagan, too, faced pressure from inside his administration to side with Argentina's military government at the time. But he decided his rela-

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tionship with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, his close friend and ally, was more important than anything that might be gained from backing Argentina or remaining neutral.

The Reagan-Thatcher alliance, a high point of the special relationship, exemplified the benefits for both countries of a tight and friendly association. The relationship enhanced Britain's position in the world and allowed the United States to stand firm on issue after issue with a reliable ally at its side.

"For almost every British prime minister from Churchill on, it has been a major objective to influence the thinking of the president of the United States," Geoffrey Smith wrote in his book *Reagan and Thatcher*. "For Britain the special relationship has meant a special opportunity to have an impact on American policy." Indeed, Thatcher and Churchill had a significant influence, as did Blair in his relationship with Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

What does the United States get out of the partnership with a far less powerful country like Britain? The answer is a lot more than simply an ally who speaks the same language and has similar political and cultural values.

It's true that American policy is more important to Britain than British policy is to America. But without its deep ties to the United Kingdom, the United States would often be operating alone in the world, with no major ally. Absent Thatcher, Smith wrote, Reagan "would have been a beleaguered figure at economic summits during at least his first term." She also famously urged the first President Bush not to "go wobbly" after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990. Bush didn't.

Putting the partnership back together won't be easy. Despite his encouraging words last week, Obama seems considerably more interested in China, Russia, and the European Union than in Britain. And unlike most presidents, he doesn't think close personal ties to foreign leaders are essential.

"Cameron is distinctly pro-American," says Nile Gardiner, the expert on Britain at the Heritage Foundation. But his deputy prime minister in the new coalition government, Nick Clegg, is anything but. "Clegg is going to have a bit of a dampening effect," Gardiner says. "He doesn't believe in the transatlantic alliance. It's going to be harder for Cameron to be as pro-American as he would like."

There are specific issues on which Obama and Cameron differ, in addition to the Falklands. The alliance is, partly but importantly, a military one, and Cameron has vowed to cut spending immediately by $9 billion. This is likely to mean reductions in military expenditures to levels that are risky by American standards. Also, Cameron is staying clear of the Greek bailout and is certain to avoid involvement if other European countries face default. Obama is deeply involved.

But Cameron, as the weaker of the two partners, can do only so much to revive the special relationship. The president has to play the bigger role. If he looks at Afghanistan, where Britain has 10,000 troops, and at every other trouble spot, he'll notice that one country is invariably on America's side. He shouldn't be surprised who it is. ♦

The Way of the Kurds

One part of Iraq is working better than the other.

BY MAX BOOT

Erbil, Iraq

Iraq has improved immeasurably since the dark days of 2006 when hundreds were being killed every day by al Qaeda bombs and Sadrist death squads in Baghdad. But terrorist bombs continue to go off intermittently, and lingering instability and ineptitude still block economic development. Indeed, the political situation has recently taken a turn for the worse, with Iraq's political parties at a stalemate in their quest to form a new government more than two months after parliamentary elections were held.

Driving down Baghdad's dingy streets, as I did recently as part of a delegation from the Council on Foreign Relations, one is sometimes tempted to despair. What chance is there, the visitor may reasonably wonder, that the capital of this oil-rich country will ever be truly peaceful, not to mention as luxurious as Doha, Dubai, or other boomtowns to the south on the Persian Gulf?

A short trip north to the Kurdish region, where 4.5 million of Iraq's 30 million people live, offers a different, more hopeful perspective. Known as the Kurdish Regional Government, or KRG, this area feels as safe as it gets in the Middle East. Terrorist attacks aren't a concern. Americans can wander around without body armor or bodyguards—even if they're in uniform. Don't try it in Baghdad. That's a tribute to the effectiveness of the Kurdish intelligence service, the Asayesh, and to their *peshmerga* troops ("those who face death"). It also has something to do with Kurdish attitudes toward the United States. There is none of the lingering resentment that is still prevalent in the rest of Iraq; Kurds are among the most pro-American people on the planet. They regularly and profusely thank American visitors for liberating them from Saddam Hussein's murderous regime—not something one often hears from Iraqi Arabs.

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There are also many sights in Erbil that you don't see in the rest of Iraq. They include a spanking new airport that puts dinosaurs like New York's Kennedy Airport to shame, and new shopping malls, banks, stores, homes, and hotels that would not be out of place in Europe. Erbil, the capital of the KRG, seems a world away from the rest of Iraq even though it is located only 50 miles from Mosul, the most violent city in the entire country and the only one where Al Qaeda in Iraq remains a major threat. Almost all of the development has occurred in the last few years, filling once-empty fields with modern buildings.

The Kurdish region's prosperity is fueled by oil. The KRG actually has considerably less oil than the rest of Iraq. It is entitled to just 17 percent of Iraqi oil revenues. So why is the KRG so much richer today? The difference is that the KRG government has gotten its act together and is much further along in attracting foreign investment, exploiting its natural wealth, and spending the proceeds.

There was nothing inevitable about this. Kurdish politics in the past have been as violent and divisive and dysfunctional as in the rest of Iraq. As recently as the 1990s, the two major Kurdish factions—Massoud Barzani's Democratic Party of Kurdistan and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan—were fighting one another. Barzani even sought help from Saddam Hussein, while Talabani turned for assistance to Iran. But eventually these two old adversaries realized they could do better by joining hands and splitting the spoils of an ever-growing economy. In 1998 they signed an American-brokered peace treaty in Washington. In 2002, just prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, they created a joint parliament in Erbil uniting the Barzani-controlled areas (Dohuk and Erbil) with Talabani's preserve (Sulaymaniyah). The Kurdish compact, which has deepened over the years, allows Barzani predominance in the KRG while Talabani represents Kurdish interests in Baghdad as president of Iraq. This is a rare instance of veteran guerrilla fighters hanging up their guns and concentrating on peaceful development, making the kind of leap that Yasser Arafat never could.

Taking advantage of their newfound autonomy, the Kurds have instituted pro-growth policies that encourage outside investment, something that is still viewed with great suspicion in the rest of Iraq, where the socialist legacy of the Baathist state lingers even among the most strident anti-Baathists.

Kurdish leaders have also shown geopolitical wisdom by not seeking independence as demanded by most of their people. They realize that, surrounded by hostile states, an independent Kurdistan could not flourish. Instead of confronting its neighbors, the Kurdish Regional Government is working with them. Its most notable success has come with Turkey, which in 2007 was threatening to invade the KRG to root out rebels from Turkey's own Kurdish community, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party). Today the KRG and Turkey have flourishing trade ties and expanding diplomatic links. The Turkish government has even invited Massoud Barzani to visit in his capacity as president of the Kurdish Regional Government, whose very existence the Turks only recently recognized.

Heavy-handed Kurdish attempts to extend their influence across northern Iraq have caused a backlash among Arabs and created an opening for extremist groups.

Another sign of the Kurds' sagacity is their attitude toward Israel. In Iraq proper, visiting the "Zionist entity" is still considered a death-defying feat to be undertaken only by the extremely brave or foolish. (Mithal al Alusi, a member of parliament who has visited Israel, was charged with visiting an "enemy state," and his sons were killed in a terrorist attack.) But the Kurds, who are secular Sunni Muslims, are notably pro-Israeli in their attitudes. If it would not risk a major rift with the rest of Iraq, they would be happy to establish formal ties with the Jewish state. As it is, they maintain informal links. The Barzanis, the first family of the KRG, have a branch in Israel with whom they keep in contact. "It would be good for Iraq to have good relations with Israel," a senior Kurdish politician told me.

The record is hardly perfect. Heavy-handed Kurdish attempts to extend their influence across northern Iraq have caused a backlash among Arabs and created an opening for extremist groups. In some areas they have been guilty of anti-Arab ethnic cleansing in an attempt to make up for anti-Kurdish campaigns under Saddam Hussein. Also, although an opposition party called Gorran ("Change") is growing in influence after its members split from Talabani's camp, political intimidation—even, on occasion, violent intimidation—still occurs. Recently, for instance, journalists accused Kurdish security forces of killing a young writer who was critical of the Barzanis and other powerful clans. Deplorable as they are, such events are also rare—certainly less prevalent in the KRG than in the rest of Iraq.

So too with corruption, which remains a problem in the KRG (its leading politicians are fabulously wealthy), but far less so than in the rest of Iraq. One old Iraq hand suggested to me that payoffs to politicians in the KRG run only 20 percent of a contract as opposed to 50 percent or more in the rest of the country. More important, Kurdish politicians deliver results; they don't just pocket the proceeds and leave their constituents without basic services. The KRG might be seen as a monument to the kind of "honest graft" that built America's major cities, as opposed to the kleptocratic practice too often evident among Iraqi Arab politicians.

The Kurdish model suggests what Iraq can become in a few years—but only if it continues to improve in fighting crime and terrorism, reducing corruption, and developing the rule of law. Much of this is outside American con-

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trol, but we can have a major impact on the security situation. A key component of Kurdish success, after all, has been American protection, offered in one form or another since 1991, when the George H.W. Bush administration proclaimed a "no fly" zone to keep Saddam's aircraft from bombing the Kurds. American planes were still patrolling the no-fly zone at the time of the U.S. invasion in 2003. Some kind of long-term protection will be necessary in the rest of Iraq, which must deal in the future with hostile neighbors and suspicious sectarian factions. As it stands, however, the last American troops are supposed to withdraw on December 31, 2011.

That is a worrisome prospect because Iraqi political disputes can still engender violence. Nowhere is the danger greater than along the Green Line separating the KRG from the rest of Iraq. The boundary remains disputed, with the Kurds keen to assert their sovereignty over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and other parts of northern Iraq. The Kurdish *peshmerga* and Iraqi troops have been on the verge of gunfire numerous times, pulling back only as a result of American mediation. Today U.S. troops patrol the Green Line in cooperation with the *peshmerga* and Iraqi forces.

If U.S. troops are withdrawn before land disputes between the KRG and Iraq proper are resolved, Kurdish politicians warn that the result could be war. That is an especially worrisome possibility because the United States has agreed to sell the Iraqi armed forces M-1 tanks and F-16 fighters. We have a moral and strategic obligation to ensure that this high-tech hardware is never used against our Kurdish friends. That argues for keeping a small U.S. force in Iraq after 2011, perhaps 10,000 to 15,000 troops and trainers. The Kurds, for one, would love to host a U.S. military base. The Obama administration should push for that once a new government takes power in Baghdad and negotiations begin on a new Iraqi-American strategic accord to take the place of the one negotiated by President Bush and Nouri al Maliki in 2008. ♦

NEWSCOM

Maryland Rematch

Ehrlich-O'Malley II. BY EMILY ESFAHANI SMITH

Annapolis

In 2006, Bob Ehrlich of Maryland was the only Republican governor to lose his seat to a Democrat. His defeat was no surprise. Maryland is a strongly Democratic state that before Ehrlich hadn't elected a Republican governor since Spiro Agnew in 1966. Besides, there was a powerful Democratic trend nationally and in the state in 2006, and Ehrlich's challenger was a popular Democratic mayor of Baltimore, Martin O'Malley. Ehrlich lost, 46 percent to 53 percent. Now, the former governor is challenging incumbent O'Malley, and with Ehrlich's statewide name recognition, political skill, and popularity, it's likely to be a close race.

Bob Ehrlich

In 2002, when Ehrlich, then a four-term congressman from suburban Baltimore, captured the open governorship, he faced a weak opponent, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, and defeated her 52 percent to 48 percent. O'Malley is a far tougher opponent. The *Real Clear Politics* average of early polls shows O'Malley ahead by 6.7 percentage points.

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Yet Ehrlich has his reasons for believing he has a real shot this year. One is that the political winds have shifted in his favor. Voters are dismayed by the "tax and spend" policies in Washington and Annapolis, and Ehrlich has positioned himself to take advantage of this mood. His record is fiscally conservative.

Another reason is that Maryland faces "record unemployment, a record deficit, and record job losses," he explains in his campaign office in Annapolis. Business confidence in the state is shattered. Ehrlich says business owners he meets on the campaign trail tell him, "If you don't win, I'm gone." Ehrlich is waging a pro-business, fiscally conservative campaign. Because of O'Malley's policies over the last four years, he says, Maryland has joined the "junior varsity" of business-friendly states.

Consider: Thousands of jobs have fled in the last few years. A thousand businesses closed in 2008, and 3,000 more last year. One cause was the national recession. But O'Malley also passed the largest tax increase in Maryland history in 2007. He bumped the sales tax from 5 percent to 6 percent and raised the corporate income tax from 7 percent to 8.25 percent. The following year O'Malley increased the millionaire's tax from 4.75 percent to 6.25 percent. In some parts of the state, rich Marylanders were paying nearly 10 percent of their incomes in county and state taxes—on top of federal taxes.

According to the Tax Foundation, Marylanders carry the fourth highest tax burden in the nation, and the state ranks 45th in business tax climate. These taxes are "jobs killers," says Ehrlich. Already, nearly one third of Maryland's millionaires have fled, according to the "Rich States Poor States" study published by the free-

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market American Legislative Exchange Council, taking $100 million in tax revenue with them.

The story of defense giant Northrop Grumman shows what it means to be in the JV of business-friendly states. Looking to relocate its headquarters from California to the Washington area, Northrop Grumman weighed the pros and cons of Virginia, the District of Columbia, and Maryland. In April, the company chose Virginia. The corporation will take over $30 million in tax revenue to the Old Dominion and hundreds of jobs. Ehrlich is making sure Maryland's loss haunts O'Malley on the campaign trail.

Ehrlich warns that even more tax increases may come to Maryland if O'Malley is reelected. "The worst-kept secret in Annapolis is that there are going to be monumental tax increases next year," as much as $3 billion Ehrlich says. But O'Malley has accused Ehrlich of being a scaremonger. Ehrlich's response? "I'm a truth-monger." Facing a $2 billion deficit, Maryland's House of Delegates is debating a measure to make permanent the millionaire's tax, which was set to expire this year.

Ehrlich has seen hard fiscal times before, including a $4 billion deficit when he was governor. "We inherited a difficult situation the first time I was elected, and we fixed it." After cutting spending, slashing his cabinet's budget by at least 20 percent, and consolidating his staff, he left office with a surplus of $1.2 billion and a rainy day fund of about $800 million. Over 7,000 new businesses started in that period, and 100,000 jobs were created. If elected, Ehrlich says he would pursue a course similar to that in 2002.

But first he needs to win the election. Ehrlich knows that this requires Democratic votes, and he's confident he can get them. His congressional and gubernatorial wins were a result of successfully appealing to Maryland's blue-collar Democrats and independent voters.

To win this time, Ehrlich has to reach out to Democratic voters generally, and to African-American voters in particular (about 30 percent of the state's population). "If a Republican can get 20 to 25 percent of the African-American vote, Democrats will have a difficult time winning any election statewide."

His challenge, says Ehrlich, is to show that "a Republican can do pro-business things and not turn off African-American voters." During his tenure as governor, in addition to cutting spending, he courted minorities by, among other measures, backing a formal apology for Maryland's role in slavery.

Unlike four years ago, Ehrlich's Republican credentials may be a strength in this race. Nationally, Republicans are winning in unexpected places like New Jersey and Massachusetts. True, O'Malley is ahead in the polls. But among likely voters his edge is just 3 points—and Rasmussen reports that Ehrlich leads by a whopping 64 percent to 24 percent among the all-important independents. ♦

Very Little Hope and Very Little Change

Russia progresses from kleptocracy to tandemocracy. BY CATHY YOUNG

In April, Russia's biggest political story was a sex scandal dubbed "Mumugate," involving secretly filmed videos of several opposition activists in compromising positions with one Katya "Mumu" Gerasimova, a sometime fashion model who had approached them while posing as a journalist. (The nickname refers to a classic Russian short story about a peasant named Gerasim and his dog Mumu.) While the videos were posted on the Internet by a shadowy group claiming to champion public morality, most independent Russian commentators believe the incident was linked to semi-official pro-Kremlin organizations—such as the "Nashi" youth group—that specialize in harassing the opposition with tacit official blessing.

This sordid affair neatly encapsulates the farcical nature of Russian political life today: the marginality and pointlessness of the opposition, the petty nastiness and sleaziness of the power structure, the authoritarian state as a grotesque parody of a once formidable dictatorship. In olden days, the KGB used "honey trap" operations to blackmail foreign diplomats into spying. Honey trap 2010 seems to have been intended solely to embarrass a few dissenters who have no chance of winning public office and no real influence on public opinion. Moreover, even the embarrassment was dubious: In Russia's macho culture, most of the entrapped men reacted with barely disguised bravado, and their peccadilloes were widely shrugged off. Some Russian bloggers sarcastically inquired where they could sign up for an opposition party that gets free hookers from the government.

Mumugate is a shabby scandal for a shabby time. A year ago, the possibility of change and discontent seemed to be in the air; the economic crisis had signaled an abrupt crash of the relative prosperity associated with Vladimir Putin's rise to power and made a dent in public confidence in the government. There were also hopeful reports of a growing rift between Prime Minister Putin and his handpicked successor as president, Dmitry Medvedev; many analysts claimed that, with his

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term entering its second year, Medvedev was at last emerging from Putin's shadow and coming into his own as a real leader with a more liberal agenda.

Despite a spike in unemployment (now 9 percent) and underemployment, the financial crisis did not hit Russia nearly as hard as some had expected. Neither did a wave of mass discontent. Rather, the prevalent attitude seems to be a cynical, passive malaise: The government does not exactly inspire active loyalty or confidence, but no visible search for alternatives exists—both because the Kremlin regime has done its best to squash, cripple, and marginalize such alternatives over the past decade, and because there is little energy behind a push for change.

The malaise is driven not only by economic factors but also by a general sense of a society plagued by dysfunction. Intensifying unrest in the Caucasus, where terrorist bombings and murders of policemen, soldiers, and local officials are practically a daily occurrence, serves as a reminder that significant, if peripheral, regions of the Russian Federation remain an out-of-control tinderbox. Meanwhile, the recent suicide bombings on the Moscow subway, which killed 39 people in two separate attacks, were a shocking reminder that this violence can still strike in the heart of Russia. And yet another peril has become a major topic in the Russian media: rogue cops. This problem, which points to a serious breakdown in the social contract, gained a new and terrifying visibility a year ago when a Moscow police precinct chief, Major Denis Yevsyukov, went on a shooting spree in a supermarket after a family argument, killing three people and injuring six.

Revelations that Yevsyukov had been allowed to remain on the force despite previous unstable behavior—and the fact that some of his superiors all but defended him as a good officer who had snapped under stress—shocked the Russian public. Whether or not violent attacks on citizens by police officers in Russia have actually become more frequent recently, coverage of such crimes became much more prominent after the Yevsyukov shootings. Faced with this rising concern, Minister of Internal Affairs Rashid Nurgaliev, the de facto national police chief, went so far as to tell an audience of college and police academy students in November 2009 that citizens have the right to defend themselves against police violence—though defense attorneys quickly warned people not to be emboldened by these remarks, since a citizen accused of assaulting a policeman would likely have a difficult time proving self-defense.

Around the same time, another news story drew further attention to the dismal state of Russia's police force. A major on the Krasnodar police force, Alexei Dymovsky, posted two video statements online, one addressed to fellow officers and one to Prime Minister Putin. Dymovsky spoke of rampant corruption, tiny salaries that leave officers little choice but to take bribes, and high-ranking officers getting away with crimes. Shortly after the clips were posted, he was fired from his job and later taken to court for slandering his superiors, a case he lost in March.

Alexei Dymovsky

REUTERS / SERGEI KARPUKHIN

Dymovsky's one-man rebellion, at first publicized only by the opposition press but later picked up by the mainstream media, was seen by some Russian commentators as a sign that political discontent was spreading beyond the intelligentsia. Further hopes were inspired by a protest rally in Kaliningrad that drew 10,000 people in January—a remarkable number for recent years.

Yet by and large, grass-roots opposition remains impotent, aimless, and scattered. Despite a few local outbreaks of protest—such as demonstrations in a Moscow neighborhood intended to block the demolition of privately owned houses for a commercial development project sponsored by the notoriously corrupt city government—a general apathy still prevails. The national "Day of Anger" called by opposition groups for March 20 was not a complete bust, with an estimated 20,000 or so turning out nationwide, but only in Kaliningrad and Vladivostok did attendance at any individual rally top 1,000. It should be noted that both cities are atypical: Kaliningrad (formerly Koenigsberg) is a geographically separate, Western-oriented enclave between Poland and Lithuania, while Vladivostok is a Pacific port city with strong ties to Japan and a local economy that thrives on imports of foreign used cars.

Electoral politics remains even less promising. The evidence of fraud in citywide elections in Moscow last October, where the ruling United Russia party won 32 out of 35 city council seats, was strong enough to prompt a parliamentary walkout even by the tame opposition parties in the Duma—yet elicited hardly a peep of public reaction. In local elections in March, United Russia's share of the vote in the eight regions where people went to the polls dropped by 6 to 25 percentage points from its share in the 2007 parliamentary elections. Still, the ruling party won most of the races by a comfortable margin, and its most significant loss—in the mayor's race in Irkutsk—was to a Communist.

With no hope for change from either elections or grass-roots opposition, some Russian liberals have continued to stake their hopes on Medvedev—hopes that the Russian president has occasionally fed. Last November, he caused a stir by releasing an article entitled "Russia, Forward!" which some optimists saw as the start of a decisive break with Putin. The essay, which argued for urgent "modernization" in Russia, appeared on the official presidential website and in several leading news-

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papers including *Izvestia*. It was not only a brief for comprehensive reform but, in effect, a scathing indictment of Putin-era policies and the Putinite status quo. Medvedev identified the problems facing Russia as "an inefficient economy, a semi-Soviet social sphere, a weak democracy, negative demographic tendencies, and instability in the Caucasus." He was particularly critical of continued reliance on oil and gas exports as the principal foundation of the "Putin boom."

Yet the talk remained just that. Putin's power as prime minister remained unshaken. Medvedev's call for a national conversation on modernization that would include critics of the government quickly turned to farce when, a few days later, the Russian president discussed the responses and proposals he had received and singled out the contribution of one Maksim Kalashnikov, an eccentric blogger who identifies himself as both a Stalinist and a Hitler admirer and who, coincidentally (and surreally), has conducted seminars at conventions of Nashi, the pro-Kremlin youth group.

The balance of power between Putin and Medvedev thus remains a subject of constant speculation. In March, when Medvedev's public call for Russia's top sports officials to resign in the wake of the Russian team's dispiriting performance in the Vancouver Winter Olympics went unheeded by Minister of Sports Vitaly Mutko—reportedly a Putin man—this was widely viewed as a sign of Medvedev's powerlessness. Yet later that month, after the Moscow subway explosions, many saw a political significance in Medvedev's higher visibility and harsh statements on eradicating the perpetrators.

More tea leaf-reading followed a March 16 interview in the daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* by businessman, political consultant, and Medvedev adviser Igor Yurgens. Urging Medvedev to run for reelection as president in 2012 on a "modernization" platform, Yurgens suggested that his candidacy would have the backing of the pro-reform faction in government—whose members he went on to list by name. Writing on the website Grani.ru, columnist and Hudson Institute fellow Adrian Piontkovsky suggested that this amounted to a declaration of war against Putin, and possibly the beginning of a push for his ouster as prime minister. But this possible signal of revolution in the Kremlin was another false start: Subsequent statements by both Putin and Medvedev suggest that their "tandem" will, in one form or another, endure after the next election.

While "tandemocracy" is unquestionably corrupt and authoritarian, it is in some ways a softer, more haphazard, less self-confident, and more amorphous version of pure Putinism. Its authoritarianism is tempered, at least outwardly, by pseudo-democratic decorum. It is less ideologically militant and more flexible: Earlier attempts to partially exonerate Stalin as a great if flawed leader have been largely abandoned, with both Putin and Medvedev strongly condemning Stalin's crimes. (An attempt by Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov to include posters of Stalin in the Victory Day displays on city streets at the request of war veterans was scuttled after harsh criticism from federal officials and legislators.) In the international arena, the quest to rebuild Russia's lost empire has been scaled down to scattershot efforts to maintain influence in the "near abroad," usually with mixed results: While the recent regime change in Kyrgyzstan is likely favorable to Moscow, it has also angered the Kremlin's unreliable ally Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus.

Lenin once said that revolutions happen when those at the top are no longer able to keep things going the way they were, and those at the bottom are no longer willing. In today's Russia, those at the top still manage, however badly, to stay afloat—and those at the bottom may be dissatisfied but are unwilling to demand change. At least for the time being, the Russian bear limps along. ♦

Sweet Home Iran

The al Qaeda refuge no one wants to talk about.

BY THOMAS JOSCELYN

This past week, Matt Apuzzo and Adam Goldman of the Associated Press reported a story that deserved to make a splash but didn't. The CIA had a highly-classified program in place "to study whether it could track and kill terrorists such as" members of Al Qaeda in Iran, but the Obama administration shut it down. Why did CIA director Leon Panetta close the program, codenamed Rigor? The AP's reporters did not say, but they did note that "monitoring and understanding" the al Qaeda network in Iran "remains one of the most difficult jobs in U.S. intelligence."

The existence of an al Qaeda network based in Iran has long been known, if too seldom spoken about. Large contingents of al Qaeda fighters relocated to the mullahs' soil after the fall of the Taliban next door in Afghanistan in late 2001. And there is ample evidence that the al Qaeda fugitives there have been up to no good.

In his book *At the Center of the Storm* (2007), former director of Central Intelligence George Tenet discusses the intelligence the CIA collected on al Qaeda's activities inside Iran. "From the end of 2002 to the spring of 2003," Tenet wrote, "we received a stream of reliable reporting that the senior al Qaeda leadership in Saudi Arabia was negotiating for the purchase of three Russian nuclear devices." The Saudi al Qaeda chief "relayed the offer directly to the al Qaeda leadership in Iran," including Saif al Adel, a top al

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Qaeda military commander who was trained by Iran and Hezbollah in the early 1990s, and Abdel al Aziz al Masri, described as al Qaeda's "nuclear chief" by 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed. According to Tenet, al Adel told the Saudi al Qaeda chief "no price was too high to pay if they could get their hands on such weapons," but he wanted "Pakistani specialists . . . to inspect the merchandise prior to purchase" because al Qaeda had fallen for nuclear scams before.

It is unclear what type of nuclear devices al Qaeda was seeking—assuming the group was not being scammed again. The important point is that these al Qaeda leaders were not under any duress from Iranian authorities at the time. Although Tenet and others have claimed that the al Qaeda leaders were "detained" in Iran, they clearly were not subjected to any meaningful form of detention if they were able to freely discuss the acquisition of nukes.

The Saudis were spooked by this news. Tenet says they increased their efforts to track down al Qaeda operatives, one of whom confirmed that al Qaeda was negotiating the purchase of the Russian-made weapons. The CIA was spooked, too. According to Tenet, the agency had learned that al Masri "had conducted experiments with explosives to test the effects of producing a nuclear yield."

"We passed this information to the Iranians in the hope that they would recognize our common interest in preventing any attack against U.S. interests," Tenet writes.

But it's not clear that Iran's leadership has ever recognized any "common interests" with Washington. The AP reported last week that intelligence officials fear "Iran is loosening its grip on the terror group so [al Qaeda] can replenish its ranks." In fact, that grip was never very tight. On January 16, 2009, the Treasury department identified several al Qaeda members living on Iranian soil in an attempt to freeze their financial assets. Treasury's undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, Stuart Levey, called on Iran to "give a public accounting of how it is meeting its international obligations to constrain al Qaeda." The obvious implication was that Iran was not meeting those obligations.

The State Department has provided more detail. In its annual report on terrorism, Foggy Bottom has warned every year since 2003 that Iran harbors al Qaeda terrorists. The 2008 report noted:

> Iran remained unwilling to bring to justice senior al-Qa'ida members it has detained, and has refused to publicly identify those senior members in its custody. Iran has repeatedly resisted numerous calls to transfer custody of its al-Qa'ida detainees to their countries of origin or third countries for trial. Iran also continued to fail to control the activities of some al-Qa'ida members who fled to Iran following the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

The Iranian regime is like a corrupt cop in league with the mob, harassing the small fish once in a while, but leaving the big fish alone.

In written testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2010, General David Petraeus echoed the State Department's reporting. Petraeus warned that "al Qaeda continues to use Iran as a key facilitation hub, where facilitators connect al Qaeda's senior leadership to regional affiliates." While Iran does "periodically disrupt this network by detaining select al Qaeda facilitators and operational planners," Petraeus noted, "Tehran's policy in this regard is often unpredictable."

Al Qaeda, in short, continues to operate from Iranian soil. The Iranian regime is like a corrupt cop in league with the mob, harassing the small fish once in a while, but leaving the big fish alone.

None of this should be terribly surprising. The 9/11 Commission, the Clinton Justice Department (which investigated al Qaeda's 1998 embassy bombings), intelligence gleaned during interrogations at Guantánamo, and numerous other sources have confirmed that al Qaeda and the Iranian regime have cooperated for the better part of two decades. The Saudis have repeatedly complained about this. Dozens of the kingdom's "most wanted" operate inside Iran today.

There are ample reasons to monitor the al Qaeda network in Iran. According to the Associated Press, the CIA has canceled one program that was specifically intended to do so.

That should be big news. ♦

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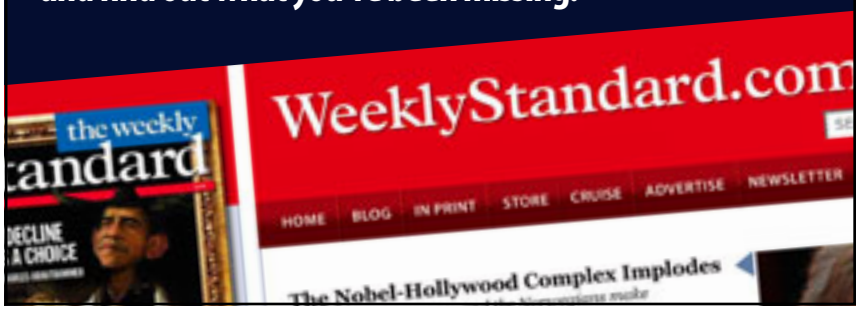

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Are They High?

What could be more stimulating than free beer? BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

According to a report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, smoking pot is a drag on employee productivity.

> Workers who smoke marijuana are more likely than their coworkers to have problems on the job. Several studies have associated workers' marijuana smoking with increased absences, tardiness, accidents, workers' compensation claims, and job turnover.

Why, then, would the federal government pay people to smoke pot—and drink malt liquor—as a way to stimulate the economy?

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act—the fancy name of the 2009 stimulus bill—provided $389,357 to the State University of New York at Buffalo for project number 1R01AA01658001A—"Malt Liquor and Marijuana: Factors in Their Concurrent Versus Separate Use."

President Obama was in Buffalo last week to tout the $862 billion in stimulus spending. He stopped for spicy wings and visited the headquarters of Industrial Support, Inc., to highlight a small business loan the company received as part of the Recovery Act. But he opted not to direct his motorcade five miles up Bailey Avenue to 327 Kimball Tower on the SUNY Buffalo campus, where he could have touted another key step on the way out of the Great Recession.

The SUNY Buffalo grant pays subjects to answer their cell phones over a three-week period and describe their feelings as they consume malt liquor and smoke marijuana.

An abstract on the website of the Office of Vice President for Research declares:

> We appreciate the opportunity to refocus this application to achieve a single important aim related to our understanding of young adults' use of male [sic] liquor (ML), other alcoholic beverages, and marijuana (MJ), all of which confer high risks for experiencing negative consequences, including addiction. As we have noted, reviews of this grant application, have noted numerous strength, [sic] which are summarized below.

Among those strengths: "The application is well-written" and "this research team has previous [sic] been successful in recruiting a large (>600) sample of regular ML drinkers." We don't know if those who judged the application well-written were using MJ or ML.

The same scholars were behind a groundbreaking 2007 study that used regression analyses to discover that subjects who got drunk and high were more wasted than those who just drank. ("Those who concurrently use both alcohol and marijuana are more likely to report negative consequences of substance use compared with those who use alcohol only.")

The lead researcher on the project, Dr. R. Lorraine Collins, had originally planned a four-year follow-up to the 2007 study. But, according to the *Syracuse Post-Standard*, she adjusted the time frame to two years so that she would be eligible for stimulus money.

The 2007 study boasted 639 "heavy-drinking" participants. And what innovative recruitment strategies did they employ to generate such interest—and eventually help them win taxpayer money from the Recovery Act? Free beer.

According to results published in the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*: "We advertised in local newspapers and posted flyers on college campuses asking, 'Do you drink 40s?'" Each participant was given $30. Which might lead one to ask—only 639?

The new study, funded by the stimulus package, pays participants a minimum of $45 to imbibe. At an average price of $2.05 per 40-ounce beer, that's one Schlitz Old Bull (my choice) a day over the three-weeks of research. Unless they're spending it on a different research product. So the money from the government goes right back into the economy, just as Christina Romer drew it up.

It's somewhat surprising that President Obama didn't take advantage of his trip to Buffalo to tout this stimulus project. If he thought it was a waste he would, of course, have told us. "If a federal agency proposes a project that will waste that money, I will not hesitate to call them out on it and put a stop to it," he said upon signing the stimulus on February 20, 2009. "And I want everybody here to be on notice that if a local government does the same, I will call them out on it and use the full power of my office and our administration to stop it."

Even if paying people to drink beer and smoke pot contributes to a lack of motivation, the taxpayer money is expected to provide employment for three researchers, an impact that will be felt far and wide because, as the abstract puts it, "funding this research stimulates the economy of the Buffalo metropolitan region and the nation."

For what it's worth, my own independent research, also performed in a university setting, confirms the finding that drinking malt liquor and smoking pot renders a subject more likely to report negative consequences of substance use, particularly the following morning. It also demonstrated that marijuana users are more likely than average Americans to: (a) eat two oversized chocolate eclairs after a full late-night breakfast involving hot sauce, (b) listen to Peter Tosh, and (c) find *Scooby Doo* reruns awesome.

They also tend to be more likely to believe the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act is working. ♦

Stephen F. Hayes is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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Dr. Brian Forrest did an end run around the insurance companies. His patients pay directly—but he charges less and has more time for them.

Cash for Doctors

And other ways to escape the diktats of Obamacare

By Tony Mecia

On a wall inside Dr. Brian Forrest's medical office in a suburb of Raleigh, North Carolina, is something you won't find in most doctors' offices, a price list:

Office visit $49
Wrist splint $41
Pap-smear $51.

Those are the prices patients pay for the services, and they pay on the spot. Forrest doesn't take insurance. If he did, the prices would be far higher and not nearly as transparent.

Tony Mecia is a freelance business writer in Charlotte, North Carolina. He is a former business writer and editor at the Charlotte Observer.

He says listing prices up front is about trying to do business in a straightforward way, "like a Jiffy Lube."

Forrest's practice, Access Healthcare, was born out of his frustration with the bureaucratic system run by major health care providers and insurance companies. His epiphany came about 10 years ago, as he was completing his family medicine residency at Wake Forest University. "I was basically being told I needed to see 30 patients a day every day, and that's what we had to do," he recalls, speaking with a soft drawl. He didn't care for that pace, preferring to spend 45 minutes to an hour with each patient.

At one job interview, he was told he would be required to sign a contract saying he'd see a patient every seven minutes or have his pay cut. Most new physicians sign those contracts. Forrest, 38, wouldn't. "I'll borrow a term from McCain: I'm 'mavericky,'" he says. "I like to fix things that are broken."

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He spent some time researching alternative business models and found inspiration in *People* magazine, of all places, which profiled a Vermont doctor who carried a stopwatch, charged patients $2 a minute, and didn't take insurance.

Forrest decided to take a similar approach—minus the stopwatch. Clients pay him cash when they're seen, known in the industry as "fee-for-service." He sees a maximum of 16 patients a day and leaves the office at 5 P.M. Because he doesn't have to file insurance forms, he only needs a single office assistant, and the low overhead allows him to charge less than other doctors. Occasionally, his charges wind up being less than just the co-pays for Medicare or private insurance.

He's negotiated deals with a lab company to reduce his patients' costs for tests. The lab loves being paid on the spot for services rendered and allows Forrest to charge his patients $30, for example, for a prostate-cancer screening test that the company bills to an insurer at $184. "For specialists, cash in the hand is better than a bigger amount charged to insurance," he says. He's found other doctors happy to join in, such as a cardiologist who's willing to give discounts of 80 to 90 percent to his patients if he's paid cash up front.

"The discovery I made was that by getting rid of administrative, bureaucratic hassles, I was able to do very well financially and at the same time have high patient satisfaction and good quality of care," he says. Even more surprising, most of his patients are not wealthy. Half have no insurance, and another 15 percent are on Medicare. His patients include homeless people who have no other access to care and wealthy people who like the idea of spending more time with their doctor.

Practices like Forrest's aren't a panacea to the nation's health care problems, and they can't succeed everywhere. But he says his experience offers an important lesson: "There are a ton of different ways out there that address the problem and give you better quality at lower costs."

The Democrats' new command-and-control health care law is sweeping. For most Americans, there will be no escaping its effects: on premiums, taxes, access to doctors, and insurance coverage. But at the margins, some doctors and health care companies will find ways to operate successfully outside the system, offering patients more control over their health care and often at lower costs than in the government/private insurance oligopoly.

For all the elaborate theory behind the new law's 2,400-page effort to "bend the cost curve," it's the smaller companies that are already bending it. Some, like Forrest's office, are aggressively cutting costs—as any small business tries to do. Others have experimented with membership structures where patients pay a little more for extra care. And traveling abroad for surgery is expected to be a growth industry as frustration mounts with high U.S. costs and longer wait times.

"You will see a flowing toward boutique medicine, where physicians who want to practice without the encumbrances of dealing with mind-numbing rules and regulations will set up their own practices," says Robert Moffit, director of the Heritage Foundation's Center for Health Policy Studies.

With the passage of Obamacare, Forrest says he's seeing more physicians aggressively search for alternatives, as he once did. Over the years, he's helped a couple of dozen offices open across the country, and he's started speaking at industry conferences about his practice. But in recent months, he's been flooded with inquiries from fellow doctors. "Since the health care reform bill passed, you wouldn't believe the number of doctors who have said they've had it and want to operate outside the system," he says.

There's little doubt that the new health care law is causing concern among doctors. And the frustration runs deeper than just occasional anecdotes, such as the Orlando urologist who posted a flier on his door in late March that read: "If you voted for Obama . . . seek urologic care elsewhere. Changes to your health care begin right now, not in four years." The doctor's story was linked on the *Drudge Report*, he appeared on Fox News, and a Facebook page devoted to him has more than 3,000 fans.

While those stories are interesting, more troubling is a survey reported in March in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that found that 29 percent of the nearly 1,200 doctors interviewed said they would quit the profession or retire early if the health care reform bill passed. Add to that a reported shortage of doctors, retiring Baby Boomers, and 30 million new patients who formerly lacked insurance, and the result could be disastrous.

"I don't know how bad it's going to be, but it's already stretched to the limit," says Dr. Marc Siegel, an internist practicing in New York and a Fox News medical contributor. "It can't get any worse than this and still be functional for doctors."

The average doctor leaves medical school $156,000 in debt, according to the American Medical Association—some closer to a quarter-million. So anything that makes medicine less lucrative could keep future doctors out of the profession. "The government cannot take for granted that our fuel is going to be pure altruism and selflessness," Siegel says.

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Another business model that some doctors have been exploring is a "concierge" or "boutique" practice. Often, these practices combine the acceptance of traditional health insurance with an added fee, which doctors say relieves the pressure to move quickly from one patient to the next and allows them to focus on prevention, not just treatment.

There are plenty of companies following this model—with names such as Hello Health and MD2. One of the largest is MDVIP, a Boca Raton firm that has 365 member doctors and 125,000 patients in 28 states and the District of Columbia. MDVIP doctors accept and process insurance, but for an additional $1,500 a year, they give an exhaustive 90- to 120-minute physical exam and run tests that insurance often doesn't cover, such as screening for mental or sleep disorders. They also help the patient develop a wellness plan and stick to it.

The idea, says company president Darin Engelhardt, is for a doctor to take on more of the role of a health coach than just a treater of illnesses. A typical family practice might have 2,500 patients. MDVIP doctors have only 600.

Engelhardt says the service isn't just for the wealthy and that people in many different income ranges are patients. He also believes that by giving doctors an alternative business model, MDVIP is keeping them from leaving health care, while at the same time offering patients needed flexibility. "It's really just a choice along the continuum of choices for health care consumers," he says.

Before he affiliated with MDVIP two years ago, Dr. Ned Stolzberg was seeing about 30 patients a day. Now that he's cut the number of patients in his Phoenix-area family-medical practice from nearly 3,000 to around 400, he averages little more than a dozen a day. The extra time, he says, allows him to do the sorts of things he thinks a doctor should, such as coordinating care with a specialist for a woman diagnosed with breast cancer or spending 45 minutes talking to a diabetic about nutrition and exercise.

"Now, I can spend a lot more time working on the complicated cases," he says. "It makes me feel like I'm being a real doctor now, like here's what I was trained to do, and now I can do it."

He says his patients come from all walks of life, from dot-com executives to school bus drivers and about half are on Medicare. "There are people of very modest means who find this to be a value to them," he says.

MDVIP has continued growing in the last two years, despite the economic slowdown. Engelhardt sees more growth ahead, as the addition of 30 million uninsured Americans into medical offices is likely to further limit doctors' time with individual patients.

"Health care reform is only going to put a greater spotlight on MDVIP as patients look for alternatives," he says. "The need for choice will be much more pronounced over the coming years."

Because patients pay on the spot, Dr. Forrest needs only one office assistant for his practice.

TOM WOLFF

The sector is also seeing an influx of outside capital. Consumer giant Procter & Gamble bought MDVIP in December. In April, Seattle-based concierge practice Qliance Medical Management announced it had raised $6 million in venture funding from a group led by Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, which included actor Drew Carey and Dell founder Michael Dell as investors.

Some providers and patients are taking a different tack to get outside the system—leaving the United States altogether.

It's not just celebrities heading abroad for cosmetic work. As other countries have become more sophisticated medically, they're offering all sorts of elective work, typically at a fraction of what the procedures cost in the United States. Foreigners still come to the United States for treatment, but there's an even greater number of U.S. patients

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heading overseas. The countries with the most accredited hospitals include India, Brazil, Thailand, and Singapore.

"Medical tourism," as it's known, has been growing for years. The number of U.S. patients heading abroad is expected to increase 35 percent this year—to 878,000—and then double to more than 1.6 million in 2012, according to a report last year from the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions.

"We see [Obamacare] as a potential boon for medical tourism," says Renee-Marie Stephano, president of the Florida-based Medical Tourism Association. Some of the more popular procedures offered abroad include bariatrics, experimental cancer treatments, and knee and hip replacements. Orthopedics in particular is expected to be a hot area in the coming years, as once-active Baby Boomers enter their 60s and 70s.

Some insurance plans, looking for ways to save money, have started experimenting with covering procedures performed abroad. There's also great interest from patients with high-deductible plans.

Take knee replacement surgery, which in the United States might cost $50,000. A patient with insurance might have to pay an $8,000 deductible. In Costa Rica, the entire procedure costs closer to $11,500. "You can stay at home and pay an $8,000 deductible, or you can go to Costa Rica with your wife and spend three weeks recovering," Stephano says. "This is more of a cost-conscious, consumer-driven approach."

And the quality of care abroad can often rival or surpass that in the United States, she says. For instance, the Food and Drug Administration only approved hip resurfacing surgery—an alternative to hip replacement—in 2006, which means U.S. doctors have been performing it for at most four years. Doctors in India have been performing the procedure for more than a decade.

It's not just cost that's attractive, either. In Canada and the United Kingdom, health reforms have led to longer waits for procedures. If that happens here, as many expect, then Americans might take a harder look at treatment abroad.

Such market-driven approaches to health care seem poised to thrive in the years ahead. As Obamacare ramps up, doctors and health providers will continue devising creative alternatives for patients who demand choices as the government tightens its grip. "Necessity is the mother of invention," notes Brian Forrest. "Doctors who are fed up with the way it is are going to be doing all kinds of different things." ♦

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Put the Patient in Charge

Repeal Obamacare, level the playing field, and bend the cost curve (really!)

By Peter J. Hansen

The incentive structure of our present health care system is fundamentally flawed, and the legislation signed by President Obama will exacerbate the problem. It will increase what we spend on health care, or lead to rationing, or both. Perhaps most important, it will undermine the self-reliance and character of the American people.

The only prudent response to Obamacare is to repeal it, and then move on to real reform. Fortunately, a simple, market-based, incremental, bottom-up approach to reforming our health care system is possible. Unfortunately, nobody in Congress has yet proposed it. Someone should. A bill of less than 100 pages would suffice to address the three big problems: surging cost, uncertainty about maintaining insurance coverage, and the uninsured.

BENDING THE COST CURVE—FOR REAL

President Obama claims we're "bending the cost curve," but it is hard to see how medical costs will be reduced with a massive new entitlement, a few minor pilot programs, and future cuts in Medicare at which Congress will surely balk when the time comes.

The only way in which Obamacare, or a revision of it, will be able to control costs is through some kind of rationing. Nobody likes rationing, but one cannot avoid it if one believes that ultimately people should not have to pay for their health care. For those who think people can and should take care of their own necessities, however, there is a better way of getting control of costs. Instead of establishing a bureaucracy above consumers and/or producers to dictate what they may consume and/or produce, we should strengthen the link between consumers and the cost of what they consume.

The rational way to control health care costs can be summarized in one phrase: Level the playing field. If all health care expenditures are put on a level playing field with regard to taxation, the market will naturally begin to control costs, as it does in other sectors of our economy.

Health care differs from other products Americans consume, including necessities like food and shelter, in the degree to which consumers are shielded from paying for what they consume. It does not take peculiar insight into human psychology to suspect that people are more careful about the cost of what they consume when they pay for it themselves.

Of course people often cannot pay for health care they need. Likewise, people often cannot pay for a new house if the one in which they live burns down. That is why we have insurance. Health insurance, however, works in a peculiar way, unlike any other form of insurance. Instead of protecting us when we face potentially catastrophic costs, health insurance policies usually cover most or all health care costs. They do not simply insure against catastrophe, but also pay routine expenses which we could easily anticipate and budget for. It is as if we filed a claim on our homeowner's insurance every time we needed to paint a room, or even change a light bulb.

This approach creates huge administrative costs—not just in money but also in time, the hours and hours consumers and especially providers spend in dealing with insurance companies. (If you think this situation is bad now, wait until the government is your insurer!) Moreover, and perhaps more important, shielding the consumer from the cost of what he consumes means that people shop less intelligently and frugally than they could.

My family of four paid $5,063 in health care costs in 2008. That includes everything: dental, prescription drugs, yoga classes (for lower back pain), and our health insurance policy, which was $2,380 for the year. Our policy has a very high deductible ($10,000), so for the most part we

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pay our costs out of pocket. We approach insurance as insurance—protection against catastrophe—not as an expensive and bureaucratic middleman whom we hire to pay our bills. This encourages us to consume carefully. My wife and I try to avoid unnecessary procedures and visits to the doctor. We shop around and choose our providers, and they are happy to serve us, since we pay what they ask and they don't have to haggle with our insurance company. All four of us are in good health, and my own quality of life is enhanced by confronting very little health care-related paperwork.

Amazingly, Obamacare will probably make it impossible to purchase the sort of policy my family has, through its requirement that insurance policies maintain a minimum "actuarial value" of 60 percent. This means that insurance must cover at least 60 percent of the total medical expenses incurred by a "standard population" with such a policy. At this point nobody knows exactly what a "standard population" is or how the phrase will be interpreted, but our policy probably will not come close to meeting this requirement, since most of the time people with such a policy pay their medical expenses out of pocket, and their insurance covers them only when something bad happens. Under Obamacare my family will therefore be forced to spend much more on insurance, and with less of what we spend on health care coming out of our own pockets, we will have less incentive to shop frugally than we do now. This is one of many ways in which Obamacare will indeed "bend the cost curve," but in the wrong direction.

Of course many people cannot afford $10,000 in out-of-pocket expenses. Most Americans, however, can afford $1,000 or $500. Even deductibles at this level would cause a huge reduction in administrative expense and more intelligent consumption of health care. Some people do have policies with deductibles in this range, but more common are policies with partial co-payments up to a certain amount, which do not produce the same incentive to limit spending. We all tend to feel we should take advantage of something if we don't have to pay the full price for it.

The current system encourages us to feel that we shouldn't have to pay for our health care, that our insurer or employer or the government should do so. This elaborate cost-shifting is hugely inefficient, and if we take into account its indirect effects (notably lower wages), we are much worse off because of it. But this raises an obvious question. If having a high-deductible policy where one pays most expenses out of pocket enables people to spend less for equivalent or better care, why don't more people do it? Why has the market produced the system we now have? The answer is the preferential tax treatment given to employer-provided health care. Employers pay their employees' health care costs with pre-tax dollars, so employers and employees have an incentive to agree upon complete coverage through employer-provided insurance rather than higher wages on which employees must pay taxes.

One policy change our country needs, therefore, is to end the preferential tax treatment given to employer-provided health care. In 2008 John McCain proposed one way of doing this: by eliminating the deductibility of employer-based health plans. This proposal did not exactly catch fire with the electorate. Another way of doing it would be the opposite: by extending deductibility to all health care purchases—of health insurance, the services of licensed practitioners, and medical products, whether by corporations for their employees or by individuals for themselves and their families. This would be much fairer than the current system to people whose employers don't offer insurance, and it would give them an incentive to buy insurance on their own.

Once all health care costs are on a level playing field with regard to taxes—deductible from both income and payroll taxes—people will no longer have an incentive to buy, or to seek from their employers, insurance policies that cover every routine procedure or trip to the doctor. They will start to shop around, both for cheaper insurance and for providers who offer good value and whom they trust. Every consumer of health care will have a personal interest in controlling costs.

How would this work? For the most part, the current system would remain in place. The only immediate change from health care providers' point of view is that every year at tax time they would send their patients a summary of all expenses the patients had paid out of pocket. This would enable taxpayers to determine the deduction they should claim in calculating their taxable income. People would be reimbursed for any income, Social Security, or Medicare taxes paid in excess of what they owe once their health care costs are taken into account, and they would be reimbursed for the employer's portion of the excess payroll taxes they have paid as well as their own share. Thus a couple with an income of $90,000 who paid $8,000 for health insurance premiums and out-of-pocket health care expenses would owe income and payroll taxes on $82,000, not $90,000. Any payroll taxes withheld on that $8,000 would be reimbursed as part of their federal tax return.

Employer-established health savings accounts (HSAs) resemble the approach proposed here, and could work well in tandem with it. Regrettably, individually established HSAs do not currently provide deductibility with regard to payroll taxes. As a result, someone who exchanges his employer-provided coverage for higher wages, buys an inexpensive high-deductible policy, and sets up an HSA

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to pay insurance premiums and out-of-pocket medical expenses may well end up losing money overall because of higher payroll taxes even if he spends significantly less on health care.

One might wonder how expanding the deductibility of medical expenses can reduce overall medical spending. After all, making consumption of something tax-deductible generally increases the amount of it consumed. To be sure, expanding deductibility will increase health care spending by those who are currently uninsured, but probably by only a modest amount. With less income, uninsured people are less sensitive than other Americans to tax breaks. But to the extent that this approach does increase health care spending by the uninsured, at least outside of emergency rooms, that is probably a good thing.

The critical question is, how will this approach affect health care spending by the majority who currently have insurance? I believe it will reduce such spending through the incentive it will provide people (and their employers) to move from employer-provided complete coverage into inexpensive high-deductible policies. The clearest evidence for this comes from employer-established HSAs. In Indiana, for example, Governor Mitch Daniels established for state employees an HSA option with an inexpensive high-deductible insurance policy in 2006. Since then total health care costs have declined 35 percent from the level incurred under the old plan, savings that have been shared by the state and its employees. These savings have arisen above all because people shop prudently when spending their own money. For example, Indiana state employees on the HSA plan are much more likely to request generic drugs to fill their prescriptions; this produces substantial savings with no diminution in the quality of care.

The rational response to the portability issue is not to impose unfair and costly new rules, but simply to eliminate the tax incentive for people to get health care through their employers.

Imagine that instead of individuals deducting their mortgage interest, only employers could do so on behalf of their employees. Employers would then offer as a benefit to pay their employees' mortgage interest. People would still be constrained by the cost of housing and other factors, but the fact that the mortgage interest was paid by employers would encourage people to consume as much mortgage interest as their employers offered. This would produce more overall spending on housing than the current system, where mortgage interest is deductible, but the employee himself pays for it. If the approach proposed here resembles the deductibility of mortgage interest, the current health care payment system resembles having employers pay mortgage interest.

PORTABILITY THE NATURAL WAY

People want "portability," meaning they want to keep their health coverage if they change jobs or lose their jobs. Congress has addressed this issue—notably in 1996—but a few people continue to fall through the cracks, and many more are afraid they might. This is not surprising; as long as employers provide health care, there will inevitably be a conflict of interest between employees who want to be covered and employers and insurers who want to avoid the huge expense of covering people who come to them with "preexisting conditions."

Democrats hope to solve this problem by compelling insurers to write policies for all applicants, including those with preexisting conditions. That sounds humane, but as many have noted, it creates an incentive for people to buy insurance only after they develop a serious ailment. It is one thing to require that insurance companies retain customers who develop health problems; this is the essence of insurance protection. It is quite another to require (as Obamacare does beginning in 2014) that insurance companies take on *new* customers who already have costly health problems, which will force premiums up for everyone else. Obamacare imposes penalties on people without insurance, but this seems unlikely to solve the problem; the incentive to game the system is too great.

The rational response to the portability issue is not to impose unfair and costly new rules, but simply to eliminate the tax incentive for people to get health care through their employers. Once the playing field is level with regard to taxation, the desire for portable coverage and control will lead people to buy their own policies, instead of seeking employer-provided insurance in exchange for lower wages. Another factor leading in this direction will be people's awareness that they can spend less on health care, and increase their net income, by buying insurance policies with low premiums and high deductibles. Removing the tax incentive for people to get health care through their employer is the way both to reduce costs and to foster portability of coverage.

In light of how frequently Americans change jobs, it is bizarre that most of us get our health insurance through our

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employers. Obamacare will mandate, rather than replace, this inherently irrational system, by penalizing employers of 50 or more people who do not provide health insurance to their employees. It is hard to imagine a surer way to diminish freedom, efficiency, the responsibility of America's citizens, and the number of jobs our economy creates.

Our aim instead should be a system where people buy their own policies as young adults and maintain those policies throughout their adult lives, at least until they become eligible for Medicare. Their employers should have nothing to do with it—or no more than providing an HSA contribution which the employee controls and through which the employee himself buys insurance. The portability of health insurance will then be a matter of course, as is the portability of car insurance or life insurance. This will not be achieved overnight (and in the meantime state high-risk pools will continue to address the problem of preexisting conditions), but eliminating the tax advantage of employer-provided coverage will gradually move people in this direction.

Of course there will still be some people who don't seek insurance until they develop a costly medical condition. Once insurance is separated from employment, however, people in this situation will clearly have behaved irresponsibly. While we are not going to let such people perish without medical care, we should by all means let them spend their own money rather than subsidizing them by requiring insurance companies to write affordable policies for them. If a person in this situation is forced to spend all his assets and turn to Medicaid, so be it. Such a person is in the same situation as somebody who had no home insurance when his house burned down.

There is one rare situation that perhaps requires a different approach. A small number of young adults already have preexisting conditions. We as a society might subsidize insurance coverage for such people by requiring that insurance companies write affordable policies for any applicant under 21 years of age. This would force up the cost of health insurance for all purchasers and might have other unforeseen consequences, but it would not undermine insurance as we know it, as Obamacare will starting in 2014.

THE TRUE PROBLEM OF THE UNINSURED

The third problem that must be addressed is that of the uninsured. This problem, unlike the other two, will not largely be solved simply by leveling the playing field with regard to taxation. A level playing field will lead some people who are currently uninsured to buy insurance—those whose employers don't provide it but who can afford a cheap, high-deductible policy on their own. It won't significantly change the situation of the majority of people who can't or don't buy insurance.

But are such people truly uninsured? Any person in the United States who urgently needs medical care can be taken to the emergency room of a nearby hospital. It is against the law for a hospital to refuse treatment in such a case. And most U.S. citizens who cannot otherwise afford medical care are eligible for Medicaid.

These are not enviable situations, but they are a form of last-resort insurance. To put it another way, we have effectively legislated a guarantee of emergency health care for those who truly cannot pay. Forgoing health insurance is unwise for those who have assets to protect, such as their homes. For those who do not, however, and for whom health insurance is forbiddingly expensive, it is not obviously foolish to take their chances with the de facto insurance that our society provides. Even many young people from middle-class families postpone buying health insurance.

Megan McArdle noted in the March issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* that academic researchers have found "no significantly elevated risk of death among the uninsured." I don't think this is surprising (though McArdle professed herself surprised); nonetheless, one rarely hears any commentator, liberal or conservative, acknowledge that for many people, and not just the very poor, it may make sense to forgo health insurance. We avoid acknowledging this partly because of an uneasy awareness that if we don't urge and prod people to buy insurance, they might not do so, and our health care system might go broke.

Indeed it might, but our reluctance to discuss the matter does little good. We face a problem of incentives that has the potential to spiral out of control. The cost of the social insurance we effectively provide through laws that forbid hospitals to turn people away is borne by taxpayers and those with health insurance. When the cost of that social insurance rises, it makes health insurance more expensive, so fewer people buy it. This in turn makes health insurance still more expensive, since more people are relying on the social insurance but fewer are paying for it. A vicious cycle can arise, and perhaps already has to some extent.

This is the true problem of the uninsured, and it will not be solved by moralistic prodding. It also will not be fully solved by subsidizing the purchase of expensive insurance plans by those on the lower half of the income scale, as Obamacare does. Given the social insurance we provide to those in need, what health insurance ultimately offers is not so much health care as asset protection, and many people on the lower half of the income scale do not have assets.

A better and much cheaper way to address the problem of the uninsured is to reward everybody whose purchase

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of health insurance helps pay for the social insurance our country provides. We could do this by replacing part of the standard deduction we currently receive on our income tax with a $1,000 per person deduction for those with certified health insurance policies. (It is critical that this deduction be established at a flat rate per insured person. If it varies with the cost of the taxpayer's insurance policy, it will re-create the current system's incentive to buy expensive and wasteful policies.) From a strictly financial point of view, this is the same as taxing those who have no health insurance; it seems more liberal, however, in the sense of liberality or generosity, and more American, to reward people who pay for the social insurance our country provides than to penalize people who don't. After all, someone with assets who wishes to self-insure doesn't benefit from that social insurance—the hospital will treat him in an emergency, but sue him later if he doesn't pay the bill.

A uniform tax deduction per insured person would substantially reduce the number of uninsured people without creating new mandates or entitlements that change the meaning of being an American (and not for the better).

Americans expect people who can take care of themselves to do so. That is part of what it means to be a citizen of a country in which we rule ourselves as adults, rather than look to the state to watch over us like children.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

How does this idea differ from other market-oriented proposals? The heart of the plan put forth by John McCain in 2008 was the elimination of employer deductibility of health care costs, to be replaced with a $5,000 credit or voucher per family ($2,500 per individual) to be used for the purchase of health insurance. McCain called it a "tax credit," but also indicated that it would be given to those who owe no taxes, so "voucher" seems a more fitting term.

This plan seems unsound and unconservative. Although it uses market mechanisms, it has the federal government pay for everybody's health insurance. Thus, on the critical question of who is ultimately responsible for health care, the McCain plan answers: the federal government. (It is actually clearer on this point than Obamacare.) The conservative answer to that question is: People are responsible for their own health care. To be sure, we as a society help those in need. That is a humanitarian measure, however—a gift, not a right—and there should be a mild stigma attached to it. We don't want anyone to die for lack of medical care, but neither do we want people to lose the sense that it is better for them to take care of themselves. That would be morally devastating for all of us.

Americans expect people who can take care of themselves to do so. That is part of what it means to be a citizen of a country in which we rule ourselves as adults, rather than look to the state to watch over us like children. Liberals tend to see equality as the basis for social comity—and there is some truth to that. Even more important, however, is mutual respect, which is undermined rather than fostered if the government taxes some in order to take care of others who are capable of taking care of themselves. In their eagerness to take care of others, liberals tend to lose sight of the degree to which happiness depends upon self-respect.

The McCain plan is also inefficient. It would eliminate any incentive to buy inexpensive insurance. If families are given up to $5,000 to spend on insurance, they will have no reason to spend less. By contrast, if people are spending their own money and saving what they don't spend, the market can do better than $5,000 in insurance costs per family. (It has for my family.)

Congressman Paul Ryan has put forth a multipronged proposal which includes state exchanges to help people shop for health insurance, medical panels to reduce the burden lawsuits impose on medical practitioners, and measures to encourage preventing illness before treatment is necessary. Regrettably, however, the proposal's central feature is a "tax credit" or voucher system that resembles the McCain plan. Ryan stands out for the clarity and cogency with which he criticized Obamacare over the past year, and he has emerged as the leading thinker in Congress on a wide range of fiscal issues. I hope he will reconsider and redesign his health care proposal.

Congresswoman Michele Bachmann has proposed a bill that would allow all out-of-pocket medical expenses to be deducted, not just those exceeding 7.5 percent of income (or, under Obamacare, 10 percent of income). This is a good idea, but it affects only income taxes, not payroll taxes. Similarly, Glenn Hubbard, chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President George W. Bush, and two coauthors proposed in the *Wall Street Journal* that we make all health care spending tax-deductible, but they did not specify whether this would apply to payroll taxes.

Conservatives may be wary of adding a deduction to payroll taxes when Medicare and Social Security are in dire financial straits. That is understandable; since most

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people pay most of their taxes in payroll taxes, however, it is impossible to level the playing field between employer-provided coverage and individually purchased health care if nothing is done about payroll taxes. Only leveling the playing field will allow the natural incentive to emerge for people to take control of their own health care costs, buy inexpensive insurance policies, and pay routine expenses out of pocket. Only such a system will lead people to shop intelligently and spend less, so that health care will consume a smaller share of the national economic pie.

My very rough estimate is that total deductibility of health care costs will decrease federal tax revenues by about $14 billion, with half of this figure coming out of payroll taxes. This seems a small price to pay for "bending the cost curve" without rationing and without a reduction in quality. In terms of the deficits confronting Medicare and Social Security, $7 billion is less than a drop in the bucket, and it might help us address the crisis facing Medicare if we first manage to "bend the cost curve" for health care costs apart from Medicare.

Here's how that $14 billion estimate was reached. In 2007, according to the Census Bureau, 8.9 percent of Americans were covered by insurance policies purchased privately, while 59.3 percent were covered by employer-provided policies. The deduction for employer-provided health care cost the federal government $246 billion. Thus the cost to the government of insurance deductibility for Americans who buy their own policies could be estimated at 8.9 percent divided by 59.3 percent times $246 billion, or $37 billion. However, people who buy their own insurance generally purchase much less expensive policies than those whose employers provide insurance for them; and they have lower incomes. If allowed to deduct the cost of their insurance, therefore, they will deduct much less, and they will deduct from incomes that are taxed at a lower level. Thus the cost to the government of allowing complete deductibility of health insurance purchases will be roughly half of $37 billion, or $19 billion. Self-employed Americans are already able to deduct the cost of health insurance in calculating their income tax (but not their payroll tax). This deduction currently costs the federal government $5 billion, so the additional cost to the government of allowing complete deductibility of health insurance will be in the neighborhood of $14 billion ($19 billion minus $5 billion).

The approach proposed here will also allow people to deduct health care expenses that are not covered by insurance. In doing so, however, it will give people an incentive to buy inexpensive high-deductible policies and pay routine expenses out of pocket. From the point of view of tax receipts, the growth in deductions for out-of-pocket expenses and the decline in deductions for less expensive insurance policies will offset each other. People who move from employer-provided comprehensive insurance to inexpensive high-deductible insurance, moreover, will generally see their taxable incomes rise, benefiting both themselves and the tax collector. Taken together, these factors probably will not add to the $14 billion figure mentioned above. These are rough estimates, however; the Congressional Budget Office could offer more precise ones.

The core of the change proposed here is to level the playing field between employer-provided and individually purchased health care, and between health insurance and other health care expenses. Both of these steps are necessary; neither one alone will do much good. And we must level the playing field with regard to both income and payroll taxes. Addressing income taxes alone is inadequate. Complete deductibility of all health care expenses will "bend the cost curve" and foster portability, and a separate, additional tax deduction for people with health insurance will reduce the number of people who are uninsured.

This is a much simpler and more modest proposal than Obamacare. It does not involve new bureaucracies, or fundamentally new rules for insurance companies, or a mandate to purchase insurance, or a huge and costly new entitlement that diminishes individual responsibility. The proposal could, and should, be presented in a bill short enough for interested citizens to read. One might object that it would not immediately transform our health care system—but that is surely an advantage. Incremental change will work much more smoothly than top-down radical change and will have many fewer unintended consequences.

This approach will initially leave our current health care system in place, altering only the incentives people face. Employers and employees will start to look differently at the huge sums they spend on health care. Employers will begin to offer a variety of coverage options, including limited coverage or no coverage in exchange for higher wages. Employees will realize that they can get cheaper care, over which they have more control, and which is portable, if they buy it themselves. People will start to shop around, as they do in every other area of life, and figure out what sort of coverage works best for them.

This will have a beneficial effect not only on our national finances, but also on our national character. Self-reliant as we Americans are in many areas of life, we tend to act like children when it comes to health care, as if somebody else should be paying for us. Surely the chief reason for this is that somebody else is usually paying for us. The approach proposed here will put the matter in our own hands, where it belongs. ♦

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Cohabitation, English Style

Can a marriage of convenience between Tories and Lib Dems endure for five years?

By Irwin M. Stelzer

"A bird may love a fish, but where would they build a home together?" asked the milkman Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Apparently, in Britain's House of Commons. After falling just short of an absolute majority of 326 parliamentary seats in the recent general election, David Cameron's Conservative party (305 seats) has hammered out a deal to form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats (57 seats). Cameron, the Tory leader, has "kissed hands," as they say in Britain, and accepted the queen's offer to form a new government. Nick Clegg, the Lib Dem leader, will be deputy prime minister in the first peacetime coalition since the Depression-spawned National Governments of the 1930s.

To say this is an odd couple is to put it mildly. Cameron is wary of ceding more sovereignty to the European Union's bureaucracy; Clegg is an enthusiastic Europhile who would have Britain replace the pound with the euro. Cameron wants to limit immigration into an overcrowded Britain that is rapidly losing its national identity; Clegg favors unlimited immigration and legalization of those who arrived illegally. Cameron wants the government to push the development of nuclear power; Clegg opposes it. Cameron wants to strengthen Britain's military capability and is a supporter of NATO; Clegg would like to replace Britain's attachment to NATO with greater reliance on a European Defense Force and would abandon Britain's nuclear deterrent. Cameron wants to crack down on judges who hand out lenient sentences to muggers and other hoodlums; Clegg thinks jails should be places of redemption, not punishment.

But these differences matter little when they stand in the way of power and jobs for politicians that have been out of government for 13 years—ever since Tony Blair led a modernized and victorious Labour party into No. 10 Downing Street. So Clegg has agreed to a limit on immigration from outside the EU and not to press for adoption of the euro "in this Parliament," and Cameron has agreed to the Lib Dems' key demand: a referendum to convert the British electoral system to proportional representation, the system that has made Italy and Israel virtually ungovernable, as smaller parties end up in a position to make and break governments.

So far it seems as if the tax-cutting rhetoric is sharper than the scissors to be taken to the budget. There appear to be more spending increases than cost savings. Spending on the bloated National Health Service is to increase in real terms in every year of the Parliament.

The quirky deal requires Conservative MPs to vote in favor of holding a referendum on electoral reform, but leaves them free to campaign against such a change when the referendum is held. The parties have agreed to disagree about nuclear power. These and other features of the Conservative-Lib Dem détente are laid out in detail in the coalition agreement.

The fun part will come when Cameron is off to some international meeting, and Clegg has to stand in for him at prime minister's question time, fielding questions from his counterpart in the now-minority Labour party, whoever that might turn out to be. Or when Cameron is on paternity leave in a few months—his wife, Saman-

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tha, is pregnant—not an easy break to arrange since the PM's residence is in the same building as his office. But paternity leave it must be, if Cameron is to be true to the practices the politicians have imposed on the British labor market and to his carefully crafted image as a modernizer.

The "single most pressing problem" facing the new government, says Mervyn King, governor of the Bank of England, is the state of Britain's finances. The deficit is running at about $250 billion annually, some 12 percent of GDP (approximately the same as ours), and is set to be the largest in Europe by the end of this year according to Azad Zangana, European economist at Schroders bank. The rating agencies have let it be known that they are increasingly uncertain that Britain should be allowed to retain its triple-A bond rating.

The new government has pledged to produce its first budget in 50 days, showing the steps it will take to stanch the flow of red ink. It will not be easy to keep to that timetable, given the wide differences between Conservatives on fiscal policy. George Osborne, the Tory chancellor, has his work cut out for him if he is to deliver a promised "significant acceleration in the reduction of the structural budget deficit." The parties agreed that "the main burden" of deficit reduction would fall on spending cuts rather than tax increases. Rumor has it that the Tories favor a 4:1 ratio of spending cuts to tax increases, while the Lib Dems prefer a ratio of 1.5:1.

But so far it seems as if the tax-cutting rhetoric is sharper than the scissors to be taken to the budget. Indeed, there appear to be more spending increases than cost savings. Spending on the bloated National Health Service is to increase in real terms in every year of the Parliament, which is scheduled to sit for a five-year term unless 55 percent of the members call for a new election. Spending on foreign aid is to "remain in place" at current levels. There will be "a significant premium" for disadvantaged students, funding of a variety of green projects, a loan guarantee scheme for small and medium size businesses, an increase in the escalator applied to state pensions, and a $24 billion cut in income taxes levied on the first $15,000 of earnings.

This will presumably be paid for by an increase in capital gains taxes on nonbusiness assets from 18 percent to 40 percent; a tax on bank profits and bonuses; cuts in benefits going to high earners; reductions in pay for civil servants (but only those earning more than $150,000); an increase in the retirement age to 66 (starting in 2016 for men and 2020 for women); and a tax increase on the employees' portion of payroll taxes. Ominously, a review of the military budget is to be conducted "with strong involvement of the Treasury," which has never met a piece of military equipment it thought worth buying. Finally, Commerzbank is predicting that the coalition will increase from 17.5 percent to 20 percent the Value Added Tax, a type of national sales tax that might be in our future.

The Conservative principles lurking in this deal are not immediately obvious, nor is it easy to find support for the argument that the net of all of this will be an acceleration in deficit reduction. Chris Giles, a columnist for the *Financial Times*, estimates that promised new spending and tax cuts come to more than 1 percent of national income, while the spending reductions and tax increases come to a mere 0.3 percent.

It is easy to understand why the Lib Dems, by far the junior partner in terms of votes and seats—they actually lost seats in the election—feel that they have gotten more than they have conceded, although public chortling is just not on. Deficit reduction, it should be noted, is not in the Lib Dem DNA, unless it comes at the expense of military spending.

The coalition is also agreed that the banking sector needs reform. Vince Cable, the avuncular Lib Dem who specializes in bank-bashing, has been made secretary for business and banking. The Tories are motivated to take on the banks by more than vulgar populist pressures, although those are present. Conservatives now in charge of the Treasury have emphasized to me that they plan to reduce the relative importance of the financial services industries in the U.K. economy, because that sector adds volatility to the entire economy, and to encourage industries that "make things." Since financial services are one sector in which Britain has a clear competitive advantage, and Britain is unlikely to have much of an advantage over China in "making things," this seems an odd goal, never mind that such an industrial policy would be more becoming to a Labour government.

The obvious subordination of principle to the desire for power should not obscure the great strength of the British system, the patience of the British people. Through days of wrangling in the back rooms of party headquarters, all the players behaved with, well, good manners. Gordon Brown, having failed to establish a coalition with the Liberal Democrats, bowed out of the picture. The negotiating parties avoided leaks and attacks on one another, despite the fact that they were coming off an acrimonious campaign. The civil service aided all the parties with the facts and data they needed to do the policy horse-trading that preceded the final agreement. The crowds gathered outside of Downing

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Street were small and well behaved. Nothing brings out the good sense of the British like a crisis.

They are now wondering if the coalition will hold together through the five year life of the Parliament. That seems more rather than less likely. For one thing, all of the political parties are broke: The Tories had to scrounge for money to get through the last week of the campaign. Labour has yet to pick a leader or to decide just what it stands for. More important, now that the Lib Dems have their feet under thos e ministerial desks, are being driven in ministerial cars, and are banking ministerial salaries (MPs are paid around $100,000, ministers of state get that plus an additional $120,000), they are not going to part ways with the Tories over anything as inconsequential as a principle, or even two. Less cynically, the Lib Dems have to demonstrate that coalition governments can serve the national interest if they are to persuade voters to vote "yes" on the proposed electoral reform that would make coalition government a fact of life forevermore in Britain, and assure them a major slice of political power.

There were two losers in this election. The obvious one was Labour, which lost about one-quarter of its 347 seats and its 13-year hold on power. It will be led temporarily—if she has her way permanently—by Harriet Harman, Britain's version of Nancy Pelosi. The current favorite is outgoing foreign secretary David Miliband, a center-left contender who among other things has worked to tighten the European embargo on goods made and grown on the West Bank and labeled "Made in Israel." He will fight it out with Ed Balls, the Brown ally and very left Harvard-trained economist whose claim to fame is the tightening of central control of the education system when he was in charge of schools, and eking out a 100-vote margin in his constituency in the recent election. Other contenders will undoubtedly emerge, most notably Ed Miliband, David's younger (by five years) and abler brother.

The other loser is the United States, whose only significant friend in the new cabinet is Defense Secretary Liam Fox, a man who understands the threat of radical Islam and is fully committed to combating it. The vaguely anti-American Tory foreign secretary, William Hague, joins David Cameron in opposing "slavish" support of U.S. foreign policy, which we of course have never demanded. Nick Clegg opposed our intervention in Iraq, shares all the European left's antipathy to America's dominant role in world affairs, and wants to soak the rich. He should very much enjoy his meetings with Barack Obama. ♦

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'Morning Prayers in the Family of Johann Sebastian Bach' (1895) by Toby Rosenthal

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Bach to the Future

The world within one piece of music

BY KATE LIGHT

The Cello Suites
J. S. Bach, Pablo Casals, and the Search for a Baroque Masterpiece
by Eric Siblin
Atlantic Monthly, 336 pp., $24

The Cello Suites, as its expository title suggests, features a multibiographical exploration across the centuries, and is accessible to both the musicological sophisticate and the curious neophyte. Eric Siblin, a former pop music critic for a Montreal newspaper, happened to attend a live performance of Bach's Suites for Solo Cello. Musically speaking, he was smitten, while intellectually pulled in by two pieces of information in the program notes: that Bach's original manuscript for the six famed works had never been found, and that the great cellist Pablo Casals brought the works out of obscurity to the concert hall and recording studio, where they now reign supreme—as well as having migrated widely and variously into popular culture.

Intrigued, Siblin took on the daunting task of exploring the suites from the musical, historical, and biographical contexts of both Bach and Casals, while also incorporating an autobiographical component centered around the process of his own search. He organizes all this into chapter-like sections corresponding to the six Suites' six movements; per Suite, he allocates the first few movement-chapters to Bach, the next several to Casals, and the last to his own journey of exploration.

Our narrator meets archivists, musicologists, musicians (including a frail and elderly cellist in Siblin's Montreal neighborhood, a longtime Casals fan and follower), and others along the way. Siblin even attempts to connect to the Suites by learning to play them. That Siblin did his homework shows not only throughout this volume but in the extensive bibliography and notes. The good news is how well the structure supports all this information: Bach's political context, his various appointments and sponsors, performance and publication history (a mere nine works in his lifetime, the plates for some of which were even melted down for other use), his family life, the scholarship and speculation around Bach himself, and the unknown fate of the manuscript, the 90-plus years of Casals's life, spanning two world wars, the Korean war, the annexation of Catalonia, and General Franco's rule in Spain.

Walking with his father through Barcelona, the 13-year-old Casals had

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discovered an edition of the suites in the stacks in a small music shop. He had no idea Bach had written such pieces. Within 15 years, as the most famous cellist in the world, he was their champion, bringing them to his wide public through live performances and acclaimed recordings, beginning the long chain of their supreme reign. Casals's own long life included many years spent in various places of exile, exerting political influence whenever he could. He opposed those who recognized Franco's regime; living in France, he refused Hitler's invitation to play in Germany. At times, his depression over world events and the political situation in his homeland eclipsed his spirit and paralyzed him. More than once, it was creating a Bach festival, or performing or recording the Suites, that pushed him back to stage and studio, and to the world.

In short, Casals brought the Cello Suites back to life, and Bach returned the favor.

Siblin does not dwell on any given tragedy as he reveals it, ably addressing political twists and turns and their consequences. Equally adeptly, he navigates Bach's life and the complex world in which he functioned: the appointments and emperors, patrons and friends, some of whom played instruments and for whom Bach was (or may have been) writing, and of course, the famous family of 20 children. Less successful is Siblin's indulgence in rhapsodic musical description: What might have served as a much-needed break from the heavy lifting of tracking insurrections or coups the reader may find simply annoying. Siblin introduces the prelude movement of each suite with a passage of programmatic narrative imposed on hyperdescription, as in this about the Third Suite (C Major) Prelude:

> Love is proclaimed in the downward, swooning scale, an amorous rush, a falling into someone's arms. The pitch is romantic. The smitten notes promise everything. Again and again the lover makes his case, rising from the deep notes of desire to heavenly rhetoric.

Then he segues into romance novel-style biography:

> She was the youngest daughter of a court trumpeter from Weissenfels. An exquisite singing voice. A praiseworthy figure. Barely twenty years old.

That's a passage about Bach meeting his future second wife, Anna Magdalena. While many will agree that the opening of the Prelude is declamatory, in Baroque traditions C Major is more often a heroic key rather than an amorous one, one of the keys associated with the (valveless) trumpets of the day. (C Major's relative minor, A minor, *was* considered an amorous key, and the movement does spend time there but not in the opening passage of which Siblin speaks.) The fact is that the historical traditions are as rich and as interesting as these misdirections, if not more so.

A fine feature of *Cello Suites* is an accounting of the fates of the surviving Bach children, some of whom were composers, especially as this affected Bach's legacy. Given the lack of a unified means to deposit or preserve manuscripts, not to mention the destruction that befell Europe, it is amazing that as many survived as they did. Debts of gratitude are also owed to Mendelssohn and Beethoven for bringing Bach out of obscurity and back to the public ear. The closest to an original manuscript of the complete suites is one copied by Anna Magdalena: Her hand was similar to Bach's, and none of his own has survived. Only the Fifth Suite, in a lute transcription, exists in Bach's hand. To Siblin's credit, even a reader new to musicology comes to understand the significance of this absence and to care about the urgency of the search.

Curiously, for a book intended for general readers, including nonclassical nonmusicians (it spent weeks as Canada's number-one nonfiction bestseller), Siblin leaves undefined some crucial terms. One such, "period performances," is not essential here or may be divined from context; but he also does not define *viola da gamba* (the Anglification that he prefers of the Italian term *viola* more appropriate to Bach), an important term to the book's central search. Siblin posits the question of why Bach had written these pieces for the cello rather than the *viola da gamba*—but without saying what the *viola da gamba* actually is.

Pablo Casals, 1958

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> The cello was a background instrument in 1720, expected to hug the shore line of a tune's progression, not an adventurous solo vessel. The *viola da gamba* was a more popular, exciting instrument in the same range as the cello. So why did Bach write the solo string works for the cello, and not the gamba?

This bears parsing. It is a common misconception that the gamba lies "in the same range as the cello," but actually *viole da gamba* (this is the Italian plural)

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were a family of instruments parallel to the violin family we know today. The gamba family contained instruments corresponding in range with each member of the violin family, and so only the bass gamba is in the same range as the cello. Next, the question of relative popularity and excitement is not so simple. Gambas were originally courtly instruments by reputation, accompanying singing and other court music, while the violin family was developed in Italy to play dance music, the popular folk-type music of the time. The violin family, though, quickly became courtly, eventually displacing the gambas, first in Italy, then in Germany, and finally in France. By 1720, when Bach was writing the cello suites, gambas were almost out of use and out of fashion in Germany, though Bach included them in some of his great choral works to create an "antique," or archaic, cast.

As to what a gamba actually is: They are six-stringed, fretted instruments, while the members of the violin family are four-stringed and fretless. The violin family was originally called *viole da brazzo*, meaning (in Old Italian) "of the arm," as the smaller instruments were played held on the arm, whereas members of the *da gamba* ("of the leg") family were generally played vertically on the knee.

Bach's vision for the cello may have been in flux, as the Sixth Suite is written for a mysterious five-stringed instrument, and the Fifth involves *scordatura* (unusual tunings of the strings). It is certainly possible that Bach wrote the suites with a specific player in mind. Here Siblin is back on track, with the information that the court employing Bach at the time had the finest of players. It is also likely that, at the time, the pieces were mainly intended to be pedagogical. The question of what Bach was aiming for is not a simple one, otherwise those smart musicologists would have figured it out a long time ago.

The search referred to in the title is not fully resolved in this volume, or in any other, as yet; nor perhaps need it be. But certainly the Suites are worthy of Siblin's extraordinary efforts and syntheses, and vice versa. ♦

B&A

Faith, Hope, and . . .

The hand of God in the social safety net.

BY MARTIN MORSE WOOSTER

John J. Dilulio Jr., director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, 2001

SCOTT J. FERRELL

George W. Bush entered the White House in 2001 determined to implement, as the keystone of his administration's domestic policy, a "faith-based initiative" in which the government would ally with religious poverty-fighting organizations in a new effort to help the poor climb up the social ladder. Such an effort, he insisted, would show that his administration would practice "compassionate conservatism," a more humane and less mean-spirited form of conservatism.

God's Economy
Faith-Based Initiatives and the Caring State
by Lew Daly
Chicago, 344 pp., $37.50

"In every instance where my administration sees a responsibility to help people," Bush had declared in a 1999 speech, "we will look first to faith-based organizations, charities, and community groups that have shown their ability to save and change lives. . . . We will rally the armies of compassion in our communities to fight a very different war against poverty and hopelessness."

But like most of the Bush administration's domestic policy, the faith-based initiative didn't accomplish very much. The Department of Health and Human Services's Compassion Capital Fund annually doles out about $60 million in pilot grants to religious nonprofits, but that was the only new source of funding created in the Bush years. Sociologists Mark Chaves of Duke and Bob Wineburg of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro looked at data from the National Congregations Survey, a large

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religious social survey that, in 1998 and 2006-7, quizzed about 1,500 congregations about their practices. The survey found increased interest among congregations surveyed in fighting poverty; the number of congregations having a guest speaker from a social service organization rose from 22.2 percent in 1998 to 30.6 percent in 2006-7. But the survey also found no increases in the number of congregations that received government funding, engaged in social service work, or had a paid staff member who spent at least one-quarter of his time helping the poor.

Surprisingly, Barack Obama has continued the faith-based initiative. But Institutional Religious Freedom Alliance director Stanley Carlson-Thies, who worked on the faith-based initiative in the first Bush term, notes that while the Bush administration tried to learn from successful faith-based poverty fighters, the Obama administration appears to be using the faith-based office as a way to convince independent Christian and Jewish nonprofits to follow the administration's agenda.

"The attitude is, 'We're the government, doing wonderful things, *you* can come join *us*,'" he recently told the *Washington Post*.

But suppose the Obama administration were to court religious charities as actively as the Bush administration did during its first term? You could come up with a policy supporting this position—say, "compassionate liberalism." What would such a doctrine be like? Lew Daly provides an answer here. Daly, a senior fellow at Demos, has a bold agenda: to convince liberals who ignore or hate religion that faith-based organizations should be their allies in an effort to dramatically expand the welfare state. He wants to unite leftists who fear capitalism and social conservatives who are skeptical of the market in a grand coalition against antireligious liberals and market-oriented conservatives. His ultimate goal is to bring European conservatism—and European-style Christian democracy—to America.

In many ways, Daly cuts across left/right boundaries in the way that Christopher Lasch did 30 years ago—except that Daly is angrier, more doctrinaire, and less interesting than Lasch was. His funding also cuts across traditional lines. His principal benefactor is the Schumann Center for Media and Democracy, a liberal foundation controlled by Bill Moyers. But Daly also got money from the Kohler Family Fund, a leading source of funding for social conservatives.

Daly advances his argument in several ways. A large chunk of *God's Economy* is an amazingly detailed outsider's account of the efforts of about 25 conservatives in the mid-to-late 1990s to create the ideas that ultimately became "compassionate conservatism." This section will be intensely interesting to the writers quoted at length in *God's Economy*, but others may wonder why Daly bothered. His most serious argument is an analysis of important Roman Catholic and Dutch Calvinist thinkers whom Daly sees as his intellectual ancestors. Daly is right to focus attention on these thinkers, including Popes Leo XIII and Pius XI and Holland's Abraham Kuyper, for the ideas they created a century ago have consequences for our time.

The Catholic Church has long been concerned about government interference in church governance and teaching. Some popes saw the growth of the welfare state in the 19th century as a threat to the services the church has historically provided in aiding the poor and educating the young. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical that elaborated on the idea of "subsidiarity"— that there were limits to state power and that decisions about individuals should be delegated to the lowest level possible.

As government power expanded in the 20th century, the church continued to insist on a boundary between church and state. Faced with the totalitarian views of Benito Mussolini (who famously argued, "all within the state, nothing outside the state, nothing against the state"), Pope Pius XI responded with his 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which reiterated and refined Pope Leo XIII's concerns. But under the doctrine of subsidiarity, the protections that families and churches had against the state are not rights, but *privileges* the state could take away if commands were disobeyed. As the German solidarist Johannes Messner explained, the doctrine of subsidiarity teaches that the state could control families and churches whenever it desired, as long as such control was limited to "providing help for the individuals and the lesser communities so that they are enabled to fulfill their essential tasks in life in self-responsibility and self-determination."

In the Netherlands, the Calvinist politician Abraham Kuyper came up with similar arguments as a result of a 50-year battle to determine whether Dutch education should be secular or religious. Kuyper created the Anti-Revolutionary party, and served as Holland's prime minister from 1901 to '05, on a platform of "sphere sovereignty"—namely that state, family, and churches were "spheres" with independent powers the state had to respect. Kuyper's efforts ensured that Dutch schools are state-run, but with Catholics and Protestants running schools with some independence over religious teaching.

Perhaps the most lasting legacy of subsidiarity is that a secular version is part of European Union law, thanks to Christian Democrats who dominated European politics in the late 1940s. Those Christian Democrats, particularly in West Germany and Holland, created a system whereby welfare is largely administered by nominally independent, nominally religious, state-funded, quasi-governmental organizations. Daly wishes that Christian Democracy could be implemented in the United States. He applauds the Germans for creating a welfare state with "a centralized, consultative apparatus for policy development, bearing little resemblance to Washington's fragmented policy environment."

> If the Democrats want government to do more to help struggling communities, there is no better strategy to build support for such aid than enlisting smaller faith-based providers in the delivery of social services, because this will create a new class of stakeholders in the welfare state and a new source of legitimacy for social spending.

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But won't government control follow government dollars? Evangelicals who are rightly concerned about this issue (particularly Marvin Olasky) say that a better way to help the poor would be to expand charitable tax deductions than increase government subsidies to faith-based groups. Daly doesn't really address this question because he is far more interested in political philosophy than public policy. *God's Economy* has a great deal on the ideas of the 19th-century legal reformer Otto von Gierke and nothing on how poverty-fighting groups might deal with the federal government in the 21st century. For example, he says nothing about how such quasi-governmental nonprofits as Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services dealt with the Bush administration, even though these organizations most closely resemble the German and Dutch groups he admires.

What would welfare under European-style subsidiarity rules be like? The *Economist* provided one clue in a recent article describing the experiences of the Romeike family in Germany, who were fined 12,000 euros and allowed to emigrate to America because they wanted to teach their children at home. The Germans banned homeschooling as a result of a 2006 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights that declared, under the doctrine of subsidiarity, that "schools represented society . . . and it was in the children's interest to become part of that society. The parents' right to raise their offspring did not go so far as to deprive their children of the social experience of school."

Would Americans want to live in a country where subsidiarity was the law? Should successful poverty-fighting groups trade their freedom for a steady flow of federal grants and contracts?

God's Economy is an exercise in political theory that will not change minds. But Daly is right to remind us that the roles that faith-based charities and the government should play in aiding the poor remain undefined—even after eight compassionately conservative George W. Bush years. ♦

B&A

The Critical Trio

Adorno, Horkheim, Marcuse, and the world they unmade. BY JAMES SEATON

The Frankfurt School, whose major figures include Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), and Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), were avowedly Marxist theorists who developed their "critical theory" first in Frankfurt during the Weimar Republic and then in the United States, where they sought refuge after the Nazis came to power. Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt in 1949, while Marcuse remained in the United States, gaining notoriety in the late 1960s and early '70s as a would-be mentor and critical supporter of the New Left. The critical theory of the Frankfurt School accepted the orthodox Marxist belief that capitalism could and should give way to socialism.

The Frankfurt School in Exile
by Thomas Wheatland
Minnesota, 416 pp., $39.95

The critical theorists, however, rejected some of the basic tenets of Marxism, most notably the key thesis that the industrial working class was the revolutionary agent destined to overthrow capitalism. According to the Frankfurt School, socialist revolution in the West had become a practical impossibility but remained a moral necessity. The originality of the critical theorists derived from their willingness to ignore or discount all the economic, social, and political gains achieved in the 20th century by the vast majority of the populations of Western democracies in favor of what Thomas Wheatland, in this study of their years in America, calls "a nightmare vision of late capitalism, in which reason had become obliterated, freedom had been surrendered, and history could finally be perceived as a steady descent into barbarism."

Two questions suggest themselves in any reconsideration of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School. First, were the theorists justified in considering themselves Marxists? Second, and much more important, were the critical theorists right in believing that revolution in the industrialized West was necessary—and yet impossible? Wheatland carefully avoids answering either question, contenting himself with a well-researched historical account of the group's years in this country and an analysis of their influence on American culture and, conversely, the effect that the American years had on their ideas and attitudes.

Wheatland's major thesis is that the Frankfurt School was not nearly so isolated during its years in the United States as is generally assumed, and as they themselves liked to pretend. "Perhaps the most vivid and poignant metaphor that the Horkheimer Circle developed in exile," he writes, "was the image of the message in a bottle"—a metaphor implying that their ideas would be heard, if at all, only by later generations. But Wheatland's research reveals that the Frankfurt School traded ideas with many academics and thinkers in the United States, most notably the group now remembered as the New York intellectuals. Although Wheatland is sympathetic (though not uncritical) toward the Frankfurt School, the most impressive figure who emerges from his study of their interchanges with American intellectuals is not Adorno, and not Hork-

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heimer or Marcuse, but Sidney Hook.

Hook, whose books published in the '30s include two classics of Marxist analysis, *Toward the Understanding of Karl Marx* and *From Hegel to Marx*, had an understanding of both Marxism and the German philosophical tradition comparable to that of the critical theorists. When Hook met what Wheatland calls "the Horkheimer circle," however, he was already beginning to question both Marxism as an intellectual system and the Soviet Union as an incarnation of Marxist theory. Horkheimer and his group had their own criticisms of both, but they were not willing to go nearly as far as Hook. The critical theorists insisted, for example, that Marxist dialectics represented a way of thinking far superior to ordinary "bourgeois science," a view that Hook rejected as a residue of Hegelian metaphysics. In one encounter, Hook challenged Horkheimer and the rest to provide "an illustration from any field of a statement that was scientifically true but dialectically false or one that was dialectically true but scientifically false." In Wheatland's account, the critical theorists responded by changing the subject.

Wheatland also notes Hook's criticism of the Frankfurt School in a 1983 essay as both elitists and "inadequate Marxists and social scientists." He fails, however, to mention the essay's most telling passage, a description of a 1965 encounter between Hook and Marcuse. Hook recalls that he replied to a Marcusean "denunciation" of American society by calling "attention to the significance of the Civil Rights Act Congress had passed and which already had made a heartening difference in improving the political and social life of the blacks and which promised even more." Hook quotes Marcuse's reply:

> What's the good of all that, since the politically liberated blacks are choosing the same dismal values and lifestyles of the white workers, seduced by the opportunities to consume shoddy goods and wallow in the degrading excitements of the popular art?

Hook's response was to ask, "Which situation would you prefer: one in which the blacks had no political freedom to vote or to choose the cultural values they pleased, or one in which they had these freedoms but chose unwisely?" According to Hook, after a pause, Marcuse replied, "Well, since I have already gone out on a limb, I may as well go all the way. I would prefer that the blacks did not have the right to choose wrongly." Referring to this answer in his 1987 autobiography, Hook commented, "For this and other reasons, Marcuse never became the darling of the black American students." The exception, of course, was Marcuse's star pupil, Angela Davis, who wrote in a 2005 essay that "the overarching themes of Marcuse's thought are as relevant today on the cusp of the twenty-first century as they were when his scholarship and political interventions were most widely celebrated."

Wheatland rejects the notion that Marcuse was "the guru of student rebellion." Indeed, according to Wheatland, Marcuse was "more influenced by the New Left than the New Left was influenced by him." One of the major differences between orthodox Marxism and the critical theory of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse "was the idea that 'late capitalism' was far more stable and entrenched than traditional Marxists had ever thought." In coming to believe that the student radicals could somehow trigger a revolution, Marcuse took what Wheatland calls "a leap of faith" that neither Horkheimer nor Adorno was willing to make.

Theodor Adorno, 1968

IMAGNO / FRANZ HUBMANN

Like Marcuse, Horkheimer in the '60s broke with some of the key ideas of critical theory formulated in the 1930s and '40s. Unlike Marcuse, Horkheimer was not moved by a rekindling of revolutionary fervor but by a reconsideration of the events of a lifetime. In retrospect, the staying power of "late capitalism" in general and the United States in particular had turned out to be not such a bad thing. As Wheatland puts it, "Having witnessed the role played by the United States during World War II and the Cold War, Horkheimer took the view that the country had twice saved Europe collectively and him personally from totalitarianism."

Adorno was less sympathetic to the United States but no more willing than Horkheimer to join Marcuse in making common cause with protesters who condemned America for war crimes in Vietnam while ignoring or condoning Communist atrocities. In a 1969 letter, Adorno insisted that if Marcuse was determined to protest, "then you should not only protest against the horror of napalm bombs but also against the unspeakable Chinese-style tortures that the Vietcong carry out permanently."

Marcuse, however, was not interested in any moral calculus that weighed the actions of right and left on the same scale. Already, in his 1965 essay "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse had argued for

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a "liberating tolerance" whose distinguishing characteristic would be "intolerance against movements from the Right and toleration of movements from the Left." According to Wheatland, "Repressive Tolerance" had more impact on the New Left than anything else Marcuse wrote, including *One-Dimensional Man*. In it, Marcuse condemned the legal violence of the police or army as "regressive," but made no such criticism of violence aimed against the established order. In Wheatland's view, Marcuse sent a mixed message to the protesters: On the one hand, "he denied his support for violence in speeches and interviews throughout the late 1960s and 1970s," but the "nightmare vision" of American society presented in "Repressive Tolerance," *One-Dimensional Man*, and his other theoretical writings "implicitly encouraged many within the student movement to pursue more dramatic and dangerous actions." If reform was impossible, and yet radical change was a necessity, any and all measures were justified, as long as they were "oppositional." Wheatland argues, "By demonizing the System, Marcuse sought to convince all of their victimhood and to legitimate all acts of opposition."

Although Wheatland recognizes that Marcuse's view of "the System" as irremediably evil "fueled apocalyptic fantasies" and justified "acts of terrorism" on the left, he seems rather sympathetic to Marcuse himself. He attempts, for example, to defend him against the charge of Irving Howe and Lewis Coser that Marcuse's "refusal to condemn the Soviet repression in East Germany and Hungary" while teaching at Brandeis in the '50s amounted to "a defense of Stalinism." Wheatland cites an article in the Brandeis student newspaper (November 7, 1956) reporting a lecture in which Marcuse refused to side with either the Soviet Union or the Hungarian rebels on the grounds that, although the former was indeed oppressive, the latter were reactionaries and unworthy of support. Marcuse's studied neutrality arguably amounted to "a defense of Stalinism," just as Howe and Coser claimed; but for Wheatland the article provides evidence that "Marcuse's position was more complex and nuanced than either Howe or Coser recalled."

Like many American academics writing about the Frankfurt School, Wheatland seems reluctant to make straightforward, substantive criticisms of its critical theory—although he does raise some objections to the use of Marcuse's thought by activists of the New Left. The relative immunity of the critical theorists from academic criticism seems to derive, at least in part, from their willingness to claim by implication the highest moral and intellectual status for themselves, thus insinuating that any criticism would reveal the hopelessly bourgeois status of the critic.

To his credit, Wheatland does make explicit the view of themselves that the critical theorists usually left unstated: "The members of the Frankfurt School grew to see themselves as the only revolutionary subject, because only they had achieved a state of self-conscious reflection that transcended the reified world of the totally administered society." In other words, they and they alone were free from the "false consciousness" that afflicted the working class, the bourgeosie, even other Marxists. Wheatland does not consider what such monumental arrogance suggests about the whole Frankfurt project, but he does comment that there was something "undemocratic and elitist" about their view of the world.

Despite Wheatland's own unwillingness to draw conclusions from the evidence he has compiled, his research does throw a good deal of light on the foibles of a group of thinkers whose confidence that they had special access to the truth has been largely unchallenged by an academy that prides itself on its skepticism about "truth" claims in general.

For an authoritative critical evaluation of the thought of the Frankfurt School, we must leave Wheatland and turn to the third volume of the late Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski's magisterial *Main Currents of Marxism*. Wheatland calls Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* a "theoretical masterpiece." Kolakowski, less impressed, notes that the authors' "concept of 'enlightenment' is a fanciful, unhistorical hybrid composed of everything they dislike: positivism, logic, deductive and empirical science, capitalism, the money power, mass culture, liberalism, and Fascism."

Wheatland quotes approvingly Jürgen Habermas's judgment that "Adorno was a genius" with "a power of formulation which I have never encountered before or since." For Wheatland, *Negative Dialectics* (1966) is Adorno's "most sustained philosophical work," one which "presented his positions developed over a career of thought"—characterizations which risk no independent judgment on Wheatland's part but certainly suggest the work is a significant contribution to philosophy. Kolakowski, however, points out that *Negative Dialectics* "contains no arguments but only *ex cathedra* statements using concepts that are nowhere explained." In his view, "Adorno's argument boils down to an assortment of ideas borrowed uncritically from Marx, Hegel, Nietzsche, Lukács, Bergson, and Bloch." Adorno himself contributes "an almost unparalleled vagueness of exposition," making *Negative Dialectics* "a model of professorial bombast concealing poverty of thought."

As for Marcuse, in contrast to Wheatland, Kolakowski believes that the New Left interpreted Marcuse fairly accurately. He was, indeed, opposed to "tolerance, democracy, and free speech," since these stood in the way of the radical transformation for which he yearned.

Reflecting on the contemporary relevance of the critical theorists, Wheatland finds it "striking to consider how rapidly the legacy of the Frankfurt School disappeared from the public intellectual arena and how quickly it found a home within the academy." It is, perhaps, even more striking to observe the degree to which the group's key thesis—the notion that the freedoms and prosperity offered by the United States and other advanced industrial societies are meaningless because they lack spiritual depth or, as Marcuse put it, are "one-dimensional"—has been taken up not by scholars eager to publish books about "late capitalism" but by true believers determined to destroy what some of them call "the Great Satan." ♦

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B&A

Acrylic Lyricist

Robert Natkin, 1930-2010

BY DAVID GELERNTER

The eminent abstract painter Robert Natkin died on April 20 in Danbury, Connecticut, aged 79. The Metropolitan, Guggenheim, Whitney, and Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Hirschhorn in Washington all own Natkin paintings. In one sense, he was a magnificent survival of the New York School of abstract expressionism, an emissary from the fertile plains of the postwar era to the hard-baked artistic desert of today. But Natkin was no mere survival, because his art continued to grow throughout his career. His last paintings are his best.

Formally, there was little change over the decades: Misty, delicate grids of color surround contrasting rectangles, circles, bent lines, or blobs that stand out like sudden inspirations just emerged from a colorful fog of thought. (Often he created his mists using a sponge wrapped in textured cloth.) His overlapping color-screens are each as nuanced and mobile as sheets of cloth in a mild, fragrant breeze. Sometimes the gaps in the many-layered mist (like stacks of delicate window screening) interfere; sometimes they coincide, giving you a view deep into the painting and revealing the strange incandescence at its core. Natkin's color thinking grew stronger and more striking throughout his life until he achieved (at his best) sublime color chords, often built around peaches and light magentas or an arresting deep, cool green: Natkin green. He worked steadily, mainly in acrylics, until (in the last few years of his life) he was no longer able to paint. His work is, in fact, a lesson in the power of acrylics: He exploits their translucence to make deep, glowing color pools; their short drying-times make it natural for him to build his mesmerizing mists out of many superimposed layers that remain distinct.

Natkin was born in Chicago in 1930. As a child and teenager he was

THE WHITE GALLERY

fascinated by art (naturally, his parents discouraged him) and by the movies: He'd take in a movie every day if he could. In 1957 he married the painter Judith Dolnick. Two years later they moved to New York and, in 1970, to Redding, Connecticut, where there was space for a rambling, fine studio. He spent the rest of his life there. He was born a Jew and became one of the many self-described "Jewish atheists." But the letters he stitched together to make the text of his Peter Fuller Memorial Lecture in 1992 refer often to religious and spiritual questions. He told Jewish jokes and stories and quoted the odd piece of rabbinic wisdom all his life.

He reached artistic maturity in the late 1960s, when he began to paint his glowing mists. During the seventies his characteristic foreground shapes step forward into the limelight. In 1981, Abrams published one of their two-ton specials about his work, a book with critical essays, an interview, a biography, and photographs of nearly 200 Natkin paintings. It sealed his elevation to the rank of grand master.

After the 1970s, however, the art world lost interest in Robert Natkin. Not surprising, considering that it had been set upon by thugs bent on eviscerating it and converting the bloody remains into a neo-Soviet propaganda instrument. Politically, Natkin was always a cheerful and genial leftist; but he was an artist, not a commissar, and his fall from favor was inevitable as the art establishment of the 1980 and '90s (paced by the grim recurring plague of the Whitney Biennial) took on the interesting persona of a rock-throwing mob of deinstitutionalized psychotics. But it's wonderful to record that Natkin made a comeback, starting in the late 1990s. He had several marvelous shows at galleries in Manhattan and elsewhere around the country. Robert Natkin shows us that abstract expressionism is the Stradivarius of modern styles, capable of transcendent loveliness in the hands of a master who will impose his will on the instrument. Its range is not as great as the grand piano of figurative art, but it can be nearly as powerful and more lyrical.

I had the privilege of knowing him towards the end of his life. We exchanged paintings—a common transaction among artists, but a movingly generous gesture on the part of a legendary virtuoso trading with a much younger unknown. Generosity in the deepest sense is the essence of his achievement. He had the gift of ungrudging enthusiasm—of realizing and filling out his own large personality to the edges, of entering fully into other people's art and ideas. Most of us live our lives within a couple of clicks up or down of the emotional volume control. But Natkin went

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straight to the limits: In his introduction to the published version of the Fuller Memorial Lecture, Roger Scruton writes of the lecture itself that "the audience was captivated, [Natkin] visibly identified with every object and idea he presented."

Intelligent, passionate enthusiasm, the sunlight of the soul, is one of God's rarest gifts. It made Robert Natkin a blessing to everyone who knew him, and makes his art as bright and warm and alive as a bonfire on a cold night. ♦

B&A

All Dude Revue

Academic overanalysis strangles 'The Big Lebowski.'

BY ZACK MUNSON

Now, a pop quiz. Name the subject of the essay from which the following quotation is taken:

> [Jokes] thrust the listener and the teller into the complex economy that comprises lived experience. They force a recognition that life at its very core is—to use a fancy word—inter-subjective, by which I mean every person's sense of self is constituted as a shifting psychic field of forces that includes the psychic input of other people.

And the following:

> Unlike the consumer, who relates to pop culture first in terms of desire and thus acquisition, the fan approaches its object with an "affective sensibility," seeking it out . . . as a way of organizing and thus establishing a certain mode of mattering in opposition to other available models.

And the following still:

> In other words, can we see [blank] as a parody not of communism, but of our peculiar anxieties about the Stalinist version of it, as well as our linking of those anxieties to any sort of thinking that attempts to envision a non-capitalist and collectivist future?

All right, pencils down. If you said anything other than *The Big Lebowski*, you are wrong. Yes, you heard right: *The Big Lebowski*, the Coen brothers' wacky 1998 movie about bowling, pornography, Saddam Hussein, and bowling. The movie that introduced us to The Dude, an easy-living, pot-smoking, bowling-loving, nihilist-fighting—well, dude. The movie that, after a dismal box office performance, has become the cult film of the last decade, inspiring all manner of devotion and imitation, everything from Halloween costumes and drinking games to trivia contests and a series of nationwide *Lebowski*-themed conventions.

The Year's Work in Lebowski Studies
by Edward P. Comentale and Aaron Jaffe
Indiana, 512 pp., $24.95

Yes, some people, perhaps, love *Lebowski* a little too much; and of course, there are others who don't care for it at all. And that's fine. The movie is ridiculous, it's profane, it's violent, it's weird. It's certainly not for everyone. But it is a movie that I have always enjoyed. Until, that is, I read *The Year's Work in Lebowski Studies*, the book of academic essays from which those opening quotations issue. Edward Comentale and Aaron Jaffe, the English professors who edited this volume, begin their introduction with a question: "So what's a Lebowski, you might ask?" Or if you're not into brevity (and with *The Year's Work* coming in at a whopping 512 pages these academics clearly are not), "What kind of thing is a Lebowski? How does it exist in the world? How does it present itself to human consciousness?"

These are questions that most people have probably never found it necessary to ask. But as Comentale and Jaffe declare, "We're academics. . . . Overachievers, if you will." (Really?) Suffice it to say, the 21 contributing academics do ask these questions, and try, at length, to answer them—and a slew of other, even less pressing, ones. A quick survey of the subjects these overachievers have been hard at work overachieving at reveals a smorgasbord of the overthought and the overwrought: "*The Big Lebowski* as Medieval Grail Quest," "Metonymic Hats and Metaphoric Tumbleweeds," "*The Big Lebowski* and Paul de Man: Historicizing Irony and Ironizing Historicism," "Masculinities in *The Big Lebowski*"—and these are just the titles. One contributor boldly states that "the citationality of Dudespeak is, of course, a meta-commentary on the condition of *irony*." Another declares, "I could argue that in a world in which the signifier is not aimed at the conventional signifieds of presence (and especially those of Marxism and psychoanalysis that I have been emphasizing), it can aim at anything, so why not bowling?"

Indeed, why not? Yet another proclaims:

> Infinite frontings do not recede infinitely, but instead give way to the nothingness the optical illusion of their fronting tries to refocus as something, disappeared through infinite recession, but looming as a fact of accrued fronting.

I don't even have a joke for that one. There are dozens, perhaps hundreds, of equally quotable inanities here, but the sad fact is that these scholars do not actually have anything to say; even sadder is that they use far too many words to say nothing. And saddest of all, these meta-commentaries on the matterings of signified frontings are all very serious, very uptight, very un-Dude. The obvious question raised by all this bloviating, jargon-making buzzkill is, Why? Or as the Dude himself might ask, "What the $%*@?" Well, these are aspiring academics; what else do they have to do but ruin everybody's good time? ♦

Zack Munson is a writer and comedian in Washington.

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B&A

Platinum Formula

Why has 'Glee' succeeded when other TV musicals have failed? **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

The Fox show *Glee*, about the comic travails and triumphs of high-school singers in Ohio, developed a fanatical but small following last fall, took a break for three months, and upon its return to the air in April began scoring viewership numbers no first-year network series has seen in years. The show is a landmark of sorts. Since the dawn of television more than 60 years ago, the networks have tried and failed dozens of times to produce a weekly musical comedy. *Glee* is the first series to do it successfully—ever. How has it succeeded where so many predecessors failed?

The conventional answer is that *Glee* is a fictional knockoff of *American Idol*, featuring a large cast of talented young unknowns singing several brilliantly arranged and extraordinarily crisp pop numbers each week. Like *Idol*, *Glee* plays off the emotions previously generated by the American bubble gum songbook, so that its viewers bring their own preexisting responses to those songs with them. There are no duds, no dead numbers to sit through; everything you hear and see has already been granted the seal of approval by millions of fans.

Ryan Murphy, the creator and guiding light of *Glee*, somehow sussed out the great failing of all earlier efforts to make a musical series; their songs were invariably unmemorable, because how could any program successfully generate four or five fresh new numbers a week for 13 to 26 weeks? It's rare enough for a Broadway musical on which people work for years to have even one memorable song. Murphy has been savvy enough not to feature a single original song, perhaps cognizant of the fact that the nightmarish climactic moment of every *American Idol* season has been the performance of a perfectly ghastly tune no one ever heard before or would want to hear again.

Murphy, who directs many of the episodes as well, is clearly a student of the musical, and understands how to film the numbers to give them maximum impact. To watch and hear Lea Michele, the clarion-voiced female lead, angrily belting out the recent pop anthem "Take a Bow" is to have the rare experience on television of the kind of transport usually only available to Broadway audiences who were in the presence of one of those performers of legend, like Jennifer Holliday bringing down the house in *Dreamgirls*. The show's first episode concluded with Michele performing a duet with the male ingénue, Cory Monteith, to Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'," in a rendition so sharp and thrilling it succeeded in making one forget that this was the same song that accompanied Tony Soprano's journey to endless purgatory in the final scene of *The Sopranos*. *Glee* is greatest hits on steroids, and that has made all the difference.

It has to, because when the extraordinarily exciting cast isn't singing on *Glee*, the show is repulsively sour and mean-spirited—though its ugliness is somewhat disguised by Murphy's purposefully stylized and deliberately unrealistic depiction of a high school. The glee club is a collection of misfits and ne'er-do-wells managed by a well-meaning but extremely naïve Spanish teacher called Mr. Schue (Matthew Morrison). For no particular reason, the glee club lives under a sustained attack on its existence by Sue Sylvester, the iron-willed coach of the school's cheerleaders (Jane Lynch, delivering what may end up as one of the medium's most memorable turns).

Sue is one of the seemingly unending lineup of female monsters. Mr. Schue is married to a brittle and unpleasant woman who fakes a pregnancy to keep him; and he's attracted to a guidance counselor who is so germophobic she is repelled by the thought of personal contact. The club's lead male singer has been cuckolded by his thoughtless and selfish girlfriend; she becomes pregnant and, though they have never had sex, she convinces him the baby is his anyway. Finally, there's Rachel Berry (Michele), the ravenously ambitious lead singer whose raging egotism is outdone only by her clumsiness; she's every bit as sociopathic as Sue Sylvester except that she can't get the job done.

The outlandishness of the pregnancy plot lines became too much to handle for a show that was proving to have mass appeal. Murphy and his team toned it down and sweetened it up when they brought *Glee* back this spring, but they made sure to add a few more horrible women (played by the hilarious Molly Shannon and the fascinating Idina Menzel). *Glee* is not only notable for its unprecedented triumph with the musical form on television; it's also the most misogynistic show I've ever seen. Because of *Glee*'s sheer novelty, Murphy and Co. are getting away with it, but if they don't get control of themselves, their show's poisonous depictions of women are going to drive viewers away by the millions once the novelty wears off. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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"In an email sent to millions of people who supported Hillary Clinton's White House campaign, the former President asks: 'How would you like the chance to come up to New York and spend the day with me?' For those who would like the One-Day-With-Bill prize, an online donation of as little as $5 … will buy them the chance." —The Times of London, May 13, 2010

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Chosen One: S.I. Model Didn't Know She Entered Lotto!

Israeli supermodel Bar Refaeli was stunned to learn she had won a day with Bill Clinton. "Someone else must have put my name in," she speculated. Within hours of announcing the winner, Clinton called Refaeli to tell her the good news and said he looked forward to improving relations between their two countries. "He told me that I embody the Land of Milk and

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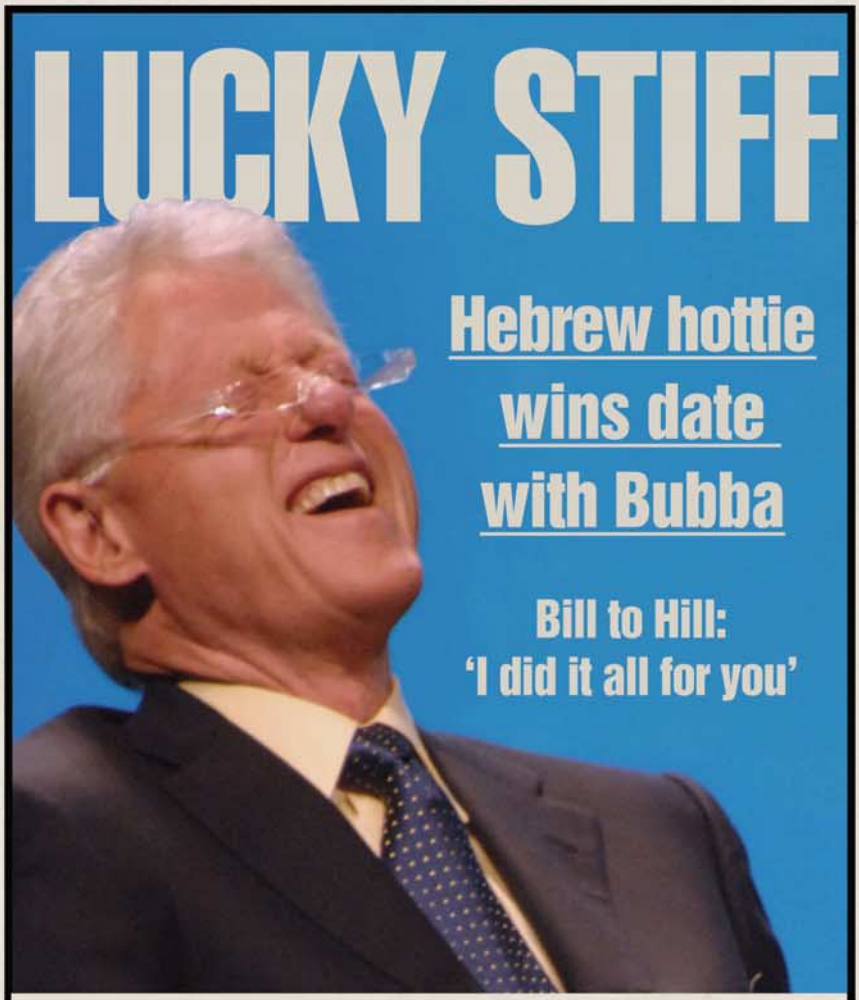
LUCKY STIFF



Hebrew hottie wins date with Bubba

Bill to Hill: 'I did it all for you'

Former president Bill Clinton said he was "ecstatic and thrilled" by the results of his fundraising efforts on behalf of his wife, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, whose presidential campaign had been bogged down in debt. The One-Day-With-Bill prize generated millions of dollars and one lucky winner—Israeli model Bar Refaeli. The former president also expressed relief the winner was a woman: "It sure would've been awkward riding horses on the beach with another man, not to mention the Swedish couples'

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